At the close of the Revolutionary War a host of newly self-confident and self-conscious American intellectuals engaged in an intensive examination of their newly independent country. The next several decades witnessed an outpouring of curiosity directed to every aspect of life in the new nation. American geography, American society, American language, and American flora and fauna became the objects of intense scrutiny by both the greater and lesser thinkers of the day. Among the most important of these endeavors were the many attempts to preserve a now common past through the collection and publication of historical documents and narratives, the formation of historical and antiquarian societies, and the writing of narrative histories of the several states and of the new United States itself.

Of those active in these areas, among the most prominent was the entrepreneurial resident of New York and Philadelphia, Ebenezer Hazard. A man of diverse interests, Hazard was born in Philadelphia in 1744 and studied with the distinguished Presbyterian educator, Samuel Finley, at both his Nottingham, Maryland academy and at the College of New Jersey in Princeton. After graduation he joined the bookselling firm of Noel and Hazard in New York City. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he became city postmaster and served successively as Surveyor of Post Roads and Postmaster General under the Articles of Confederation. Failing reappointment to the latter post after adoption of the new Constitution, Hazard returned to Philadelphia where he pursued a significant career as stock and insurance broker, promoted internal improvements, and became the new nation's most visible and important promoter of the many varieties of historical scholarship.

Hazard's curiosity about the American past and its records seems to have first come to fruition during his years in New York City. He began what was to become an extensive collection of newspapers, pamphlets, maps, and documents, made aborted attempts to publish a life of Samuel Finley and a collection of maritime documents pertaining to America, and traveled extensively in his official capacities. Using the opportunities presented by his travels to search out and copy records, Hazard observed the generally poor condition of local archives and became convinced that something must be done for their preservation before they were lost, stolen, or destroyed. In late 1776 he wrote the New York
Committee of Safety importuning them to take "proper measures ... to secure those authentic documents, which may be of great service in a future day."  

Eighteen months later Hazard approached the Continental Congress with a proposal to visit each of the states in order to gather a "collection of American State Papers ... to furnish materials for a good history of the United States." He petitioned Congress for assistance in the form of "a certificate of their approbation ... and a recommendation to the several Governors and Presidents to grant ... free access to the records of their respective States." A special committee determined his proposal "laudable, and ... productive to public utility" and urged the states and private persons to assist him and provide him with free copies of documents. Coincidentally, Hazard became the first to receive a government grant for scholarly work when he was awarded one thousand dollars to help defray expenses.

For the next three years, Hazard devoted many of his free hours in the burgeoning archives of the new states. Much of late 1779 and early 1780 he spent in Boston living with the Reverend William Gordon, examining the records of Massachusetts Bay. Later that year he returned to Boston and, early in 1781, moved on to Plymouth to copy the records of the New England Confederation. The 541 pages copied at Plymouth eventually became volume two of the first documentary collection published in the United States. During this period, he also made extensive copies of New Hampshire and Pennsylvania records.

While combining Post Office business with his scholarly avocation, Hazard repeatedly came in contact with those of similar intellectual interests. During a southern journey in 1778, he spent at least two evenings with the Charleston physician, David Ramsay. A member of the Continental Congress, Ramsay later published two important studies of South Carolina.

The next year, while copying the Massachusetts records, Hazard again stayed at the Jamaica Plain home of William Gordon. At this time, Gordon was gathering material for his own history. Hazard's most important meeting, however, came in Dover, New Hampshire where he met the Reverend Jeremy Belknap, then absorbed in his study of that state's history. This meeting established an enduring friendship resulting in the Philadelphia publication of the first volume of Belknap's History of New Hampshire in 1784 and an extensive correspondence on personal, political, and scholarly matters. After Belknap became pastor of the Federal Street Church in Boston, Hazard visited his home on numerous occasions and was there introduced to local authors such as Menasseh Cutler and Noah Webster, who were also beginning to write on American topics.

The most important fruit of this friendship was a scholarly collaboration lasting until Belknap's death in 1798. In early 1779, Belknap suggested that Hazard supplement his documentary efforts with a "biographical dictionary" of important Americans. Belknap himself had already begun such an effort and
promised to turn over materials he had already gathered for that purpose. At that time, Hazard contemplated writing a geography of the United States after he finished his documentary collection and suggested that Belknap do the biographies. In turn, Hazard would supply the information he had collected. For the next decade, the two friends exchanged ideas about such a collection and debated which of them should be the author. Eventually Belknap succumbed to Hazard's urgings and published two of the three proposed volumes of essays, the second of which appeared shortly after his death.

Hazard's initial reluctance to undertake the biographical project was no doubt partly caused by the discouragements of the middle years of the Revolutionary War. Clearly, the attention of patriots was drawn to undertakings more immediately important than historical scholarship. Furthermore, a significant percentage of the reading public opposed the war for independence and there-
fore felt disinclined to support American writers. Many were actually fleeing the country. As Hazard lamented, perhaps the time was just not right for scholarship:

The war and the numerous avocations consequent upon it, have thrown every man's mind into such an unsettled and confused state that but few can think steadily upon any subject. They hear of useful designs, they give you all the encouragement which can be derived from the warmest approbation of your plan, they will even promise you assistance...; and when you appear again, why they really forgot that the matter had been mentioned to them...; even public bodies act in the same manner... Though Congress have recommended it to them to furnish me with copies of such parts of their records as I may want, they have not done it... I have been obliged to transcribe all that I have yet collected with my own hand. I feel, at times, almost discouraged, and half resolve to drop the design, notwithstanding all I have done. A conviction of the utility of it alone prevents.\(^6\)

The sense of "conviction," reassurance from Belknap that it was important to publish the truth about patriot motivation in an American history of the Revolution, and the real fear that important sources would be destroyed caused him to continue.\(^1\) The letters between Hazard and Belknap are filled with concern for the possible destruction of important historical documents. In 1783, Hazard expressed both exultation and despair when he wrote: "This day I set out homeward, with a grand acquisition... Governor (Jonathan) Belcher's Letterbooks from 1732 to 1735. The rest have been (here you will join me in a sigh) torn up for waste paper. These are but scarcely saved."\(^8\)

Like all scholars, Hazard's doubts and enthusiasms were also tempered by the normal occurrences of life. In 1782 he was appointed Postmaster General and a year later found time to get married. As he reported to Belknap, "Courting, marrying, building, and a thousand other things" occupied his time.\(^9\) Finding himself "up to the eyes (aye, and even deeper) in business,"\(^2\) he essentially set his avocation aside, not to resume it until his removal from office upon the organization of the new government.

During this period Hazard contemplated selling his collections to one or another of the new American magazines. In 1787, he wrote Mathew Carey, publisher of the American Museum of Philadelphia that publication of the records in book form would probably be unprofitable and suggested they be published serially.\(^2\) After a correspondence of several months, Carey was forced to decline the offer because of his inability to finance such a project in those times of economic uncertainty.\(^2\)

The next year, Hazard was approached by his acquaintance Noah Webster, who had launched the American Magazine in New York in 1787. Webster pro-
posed inclusion of detachable installments of historical documents in his publication. Hazard reluctantly agreed to sell his collection for £500. Once again, negotiations failed to reach a successful conclusion. At the same time, Belknap and Hazard even considered creating their own magazine devoted to historical topics or to join with the famous Boston printer Isaiah Thomas who was proposing publication of a *Massachusetts Magazine*. Soon Hazard became disillusioned with this particular approach and especially with Webster's role in it. The letters between Hazard and Belknap frequently mentioned Webster with concealed contempt, condemning his aristocratic airs and intellectual affectations. Hazard considered Webster a “literary puppy” and “a trifling character.” He concluded “the Monarch is ‘unstable as water’ . . . (and) I can have no reliance upon him.” Eventually these negotiations also came to an end. The *American Magazine* ceased publication when Webster’s funds ran out.

In 1787, with the creation of the new federal government, Hazard’s tenure as Postmaster came to an end and he recommenced his efforts to publish the records of the United Colonies. Relocating in Philadelphia where “the typographical spirit of that city may midwife some of my labours into life,” he soon entered into an agreement with Jonas Addoms and Thomas Dobson to publish his collection by subscription. Early in 1791 he wrote Thomas Jefferson seeking his public support for the project. The new Secretary of State responded with a strong endorsement, which Hazard later printed on his subscription sheets:

> I learn with great satisfaction that you are about committing to the press the valuable historical and State papers you have been so long collecting. Time & accident are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices. The late war has done the work of centuries in this business. The lost cannot be recovered; but let us save what remains: not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use, in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident.

Within a week of Jefferson’s reply, Hazard distributed a broadside titled *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, A Collection of State Papers, Intended as Material for an History of the United States of America*. The forthcoming publication was described as containing “the Charters of the several States . . ., the Records of the United Colonies of New England;—Royal Instructions to Colonial Governors;—Extracts from Public Records;—and other Authentic Documents tending to elucidate our History.” Hazard described the collecting work he had done and concluded with Jefferson’s endorsement.

The collection would appear in eight numbers each of 160 pages, which could also be bound in two volumes. Each number would sell for $1.00 unbound or $1.25 bound in paper. Printing would begin as soon as sufficient prepaid sub-
criptions were obtained to cover the costs of the first two numbers. Subscription agents were listed for every state except New Jersey and Georgia and each sheet had a large blank space for subscriber's signatures.\textsuperscript{31}

At first buyers came forth with alacrity. More than a hundred Philadelphians subscribed, causing Hazard to anticipate four hundred more and to plan the commencement of printing by the end of May. With this in mind he purchased a supply of paper only to discover that his expectations had been overly optimistic. Having already expended over £500, he was now encouraged, by Dobson, to spend another £1000 on the assumption that more purchasers would be forthcoming once people could see the finished product. As potential pre-publication expenses mounted, Hazard became increasingly concerned at the unlikelihood of recouping his investment. As he wrote to Belknap, "£1500 is a serious sum."\textsuperscript{32}

Such were the usual complications of publishing in the late eighteenth century. The author or editor did not merely collect and arrange facts or compose his narrative. He arranged for the manufacture of paper, purchased ink, selected type faces, hired a printer, proofed the printed pages, and supervised the binding, found buyers, and, hopefully, collected the payments. If the author was fortunate, and most were not, he made a profit. Hazard's reluctance to advance a sum approximately twice his highest salary as Postmaster General is easily understood—especially since he was now unemployed.

Nevertheless, his earlier "conviction" seems to have been reborn. By mid-summer printing was underway and January, 1792 publication was confidently predicted.\textsuperscript{33} Unfortunately, the new year found volume one only half complete and Hazard engaged in the difficult last-minute task of writing a preface: "I hate prefaces, and am\textit{easily} puzzled to know what to say in one, or how to say it." It took three tries to achieve success.\textsuperscript{34} Not until mid-April could fifty copies of the complete first volume be proudly sent to Jeremy Belknap along with the thought that "writing expands amazingly in print." Four volumes, rather than two, might be the result.\textsuperscript{35}

The \textit{Historical Collections} began as a chronological arrangement of documents dated from 1492 through 1656. The 639 pages of text contained 240 entries ranging from the territorial grants of European monarchs and Papal Bulls, to colonial and town charters and laws. But, contrary to Hazard's hopes and Dobson's predictions, the public did not respond. Though he began desultory preparations for a second volume, Hazard found little reason to proceed other than a desire "for repayment of expenses."\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, by this time he had begun his association with the newly-founded Universal Tontine soon to be renamed the Insurance Company of North America. As the principal agent of that marine and fire insurance underwriting firm, he worked until late in the evening and could only use the hours before breakfast for his scholarly work.\textsuperscript{37} Nevertheless, by July, 1793, he was laboring over an index. Completed the following month, this effort came to nought when Dobson's printing shop was destroyed by fire in October.\textsuperscript{38} This setback was closely followed by the disastrous yellow fever epi-
In the hope that volume two would be more successful than its predecessor, Hazard resolved to address himself "more to original and excessively scarce" documents. The most obvious result of this was a decision to devote 542 of the volume's 640 pages to the records of the United Colonies of New England. The remaining ninety eight pages were devoted to other documents from the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay archives.

Despite the fact that the new documents were undoubtedly "excessively scarce," sales were no more vigorous. Like volume one, the second failed to
return Hazard's out-of-pocket expenses.\textsuperscript{41} Still, volume three was in preparation even though Hazard's motives were beginning more to resemble the wishful thinking of the modern scholar: "it will be useful, & may be profitable to my Children, though it will not be to me."\textsuperscript{42} Almost a decade later, volume three remained unpublished and Hazard had yet to recover his costs.\textsuperscript{43} 

With the disappointment of volume two and his entry into the insurance business, Hazard's direct involvement in scholarly enterprises came to an end. Nevertheless, he had already made a salient contribution to American historical scholarship. For almost a century, his collection, published and unpublished, served American authors as a basic source of historical documents. Abiel Holmes, James Grahame, George Bancroft, Timothy Pitkin, James Savage, John G. Palfrey, Herbert Levi Osgood, and Washington Irving all acknowledged his work.\textsuperscript{44} Alexis de Tocqueville placed his work first among those "of a general nature which one could profitably consult."\textsuperscript{45} 

As Hazard had hoped in his petition to the Continental Congress, in the preface to volume one, and, indeed, in the title itself he had provided some of the materials "for a good history of the United States." Had not his work been a financial failure, later historians would have had an even easier task. But Hazard's influence transcended his published volumes. About 1827, Peter Force purchased the great collection of pamphlets, newspapers, and documents from Hazard's son Samuel. In December, 1831, further following Hazard's example, Force himself petitioned Congress seeking financial support for "A Documentary History of the American Revolution" based on this acquisition.\textsuperscript{46} 

Force intended to publish a five series collection eventually titled \textit{American Archives}. The first three series would contain colonial documents including many from the Hazard collection. Once again, the vagaries of scholarly publishing intervened. The series for the pre-Revolutionary years were never published.\textsuperscript{47} 

As important as Hazard's direct contribution to historical scholarship was his support of the intellectual endeavors of friends and acquaintances. This began through his close friendship with Jeremy Belknap during the writing and publishing of \textit{The History of New Hampshire}. The extensive correspondence between the two would eventually result in the latter's collection of biographical sketches published originally in 1789 as "The American Plutarch," in the \textit{Columbian Magazine}, of Philadelphia. These essays were later published as the two volume \textit{American Biography} in Philadelphia in 1794 and 1798.\textsuperscript{48} 

Among others profiting from his encouragement and assistance were a number of those helping create the intellectual climate of the new nation. Jedidiah Morse, who had already published \textit{Geography Made Easy}, was preparing the first comprehensive geography of the United States as well as a study of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{49} The two engaged in a long correspondence in which Hazard offered a variety of advice, information, and assistance, including use of his extensive map collection. Morse mentioned Hazard prominently in the preface to both \textit{The
American Geography and The American Universal Geography. Hazard's Historical Collections were frequently cited by Morse in his Annals of the American Revolution published several decades later.50

During his active collecting and travelling days, Hazard also became closely acquainted with the Reverend William Gordon of Roxbury, Massachusetts, a town close to Boston. Hazard had joined Jeremy Belknap in encouraging Gordon's historiographical pursuits culminating in the latter's History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America. Hazard served as Gordon's American agent when the author returned to London after the War and proffered advice about changes and corrections to be made in a possible second edition.51

Charles Thomson was another American scholar, although pursuing work only peripherally connected to the United States. Thomson, the former political radical and Secretary of the Continental Congress, spent a dozen years preparing translations of a Greek bible he had accidentally acquired at a book auction.52 Hazard became an authority not only on the complexities of publishing but also on style and textual analysis.53 The four volume result incorporated much of this collaboration.54

About the same time, America's most prominent printer, Isaiah Thomas, sought Hazard's assistance in preparing a history of the printing industry in the United States. Once again, he was prominently mentioned in the preface and received the author's effusive personal gratitude.55

Finally, Hazard made two additional contributions to historical scholarship. While stranded at Gordon's home during the winter of 1780, he had taken down a copy of Thomas Prince's Chronological History of New England. Finding it too cumbersome for easy reading, he proposed to abridge it by "leaving out the 'Creation, Adam, Noah' and some other things which did not particularly belong to America."56 With Belknap's help, he added material from other collections. Unfortunately the pressures of the Post Office and the financial failure of the Historical Collections led to the abandonment of the project. Almost thirty years later, Abiel Holmes used Hazard's work as the basis of his American Annals.57

The last of his scholarly ventures was a general history of the American Presbyterian Church. In 1791, he had persuaded the Presbyterian General Assembly of the desirability of such a publication and that body had ordered their presbyteries and congregations to collect material for such an effort.58 Over the next decade a large quantity of materials came to the General Assembly and, in 1804, Hazard and the Reverend Ashbel Green, a Philadelphia clergyman, were appointed authors.59

The two historians set to work and immediately began their own correspondence seeking records, documents, and other information. During the next nine years they accumulated the collection which eventually became the basis of the Presbyterian Historical Society. By 1813, Hazard and Green had become discouraged with their progress and recommended the appointment of the Reverend

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Samuel Miller, a prominent New York City clergyman, as their replacement. In 1819, Green returned to assist Miller but these authors would once again abandon the work in 1825. Not until 1857, would the Reverend Richard Webster use the material collected by Hazard, Green, and Miller, to publish *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America*.

For Hazard, who was increasingly preoccupied with the growing business of the Insurance Company of North America and recurring periods of illness, this would be his last scholarly venture. He died in 1817, after his return from a difficult trip to visit his son Samuel in Huntsville, Alabama.

Despite his frustrations and unfulfilled expectations Ebenezer Hazard made critical contributions to the general intellectual climate of a new nation seeking to discover itself through a knowledge of its historical and physical environment. In no sense can the importance of his contributions be measured by the weight of pages or the literary artistry of his publications. He well knew that the future of historical scholarship in the United States was dependent upon the efforts of those, like himself, who would amass and preserve the raw material to be used by later scholars.

NOTES


4. Ibid., 705-706.

5. Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, April 1, 1780, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (henceforth cited as CMHS), ser. v, II (1877), 45.

6. Hazard to Belknap, March 1, 1781, ibid., 84-85. Hazard to Belknap, April 17, 1781, ibid., 91-93. The United Colonies of New England, commonly called the New England Confederation, was composed of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, New Haven, and Connecticut for
defense against Dutch and Indian threats. Organized in 1643, it was dissolved in 1679.


14. Hazard to Belknap, April 19, 1779, ibid., 4-5.

15. American Biography (2 vols., 1794, 1798). Belknap's death prevented publication of the third volume for which materials had already been collected.


17. Belknap to Hazard, March 30, 1783, ibid., 120-121.


19. Hazard to Belknap, October 1, 1783, ibid., 258.


22. Hazard to Carey, March 6, 1787; April 3, 1787; April 17, 1787, ibid. Hazard to Belknap, May 12, 1787, CMHS, ser. v, II, 477-478.


24. Hazard to Belknap, January 13, 1789, ibid., 90-96; Belknap to Hazard, January 3, 1789, ibid., 88-90; January 24, 1789, ibid., 97-100.

25. Hazard to Belknap, March 5, 1788, ibid., 23.


27. Hazard to Belknap, February 4, 1789, ibid., 101. Hazard and Belknap customarily referred to Webster in this manner.

28. Hazard to Belknap, August 7, 1790, ibid., 226; August 23, 1790, ibid., 229; October 3, 1790, ibid., 237.


32. Hazard to Belknap, March 1, 1791; CMHS, ser. v, III, 246; March 26, 1791, ibid., 249-250; May 6, 1791, ibid., 255. Belknap suggested that the reluctance of purchasers was caused by their desire for a “regular history of the United States” rather than a documentary collection. Belknap to Hazard, May 16, 1791, ibid., 258.

33. Hazard to Belknap, November 30, 1791, ibid., 276.

34. Hazard to Belknap, January 21, 1792, ibid., 280-281.

35. Hazard to Belknap, April 13, 1792, ibid., 290-291.

36. Hazard to Belknap, September, 1792, ibid., 308-309.


38. Hazard to Belknap, July 27, 1793, ibid., 328; August 27, 1793, ibid., 331; October 30, ibid., 343.
41. Hazard to Belknap, January 14, 1796, ibid., 361.
42. Hazard to Jedidiah Morse, July 4, 1795, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
43. Hazard to Morse, March 5, 1803, ibid.
45. Democracy in America, ed. by J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner, trans. by George Lawrence (New York, 1966), 688. Tocqueville informed his readers that: "there is a copy of this work in the Bibliotheque royale." Ibid., 689.
47. Ibid., 11. Eventually, many of these documents became part of the Ebenezer Hazard Collection in the Library of Congress.
48. Upon completion of volume one of the History, Belknap wrote Hazard: "There is no part of my book on which I set an higher value than the paragraph on the back side of the title-page, where your name appears in such a connexion as reminds me of two of Pope's lines to Bolingbroke: 'Shall, then, this verse to future age pretend? Thou wert my guide, philosopher and friend!'" July 4, 1784, CMHS, ser. v, II, 375.
49. Annals of the Americana Revolutions (Hartford, 1824).
53. Ibid., 239–256. Ibid., XXXIV (1956), 112–123.
54. The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Covenant, Commonly Called the Old and New Testament; Translated from the Greek, (Philadelphia, 1808).
57. American Annals; or, a Chronological History of America, from its Discovery in MCCCCXCII to MDCCCVI (2 vols., Cambridge, 1808). The original material is located in the Ebenezer Hazard, American Chronology Manuscript Collection, New York Historical Society and the Ebenezer Hazard Collection, Library of Congress.
59. Ibid., 287.
60. Ibid., 535.