It is that particular wise and good God, who is the Author and Owner of our System, that I propose for the Object of my Praise and Adoration, and that next to the Praise due to his Wisdom, I believe he is pleased and delights in the Happiness of those he has created; and since without Virtue Man can have no Happiness in this World, I firmly believe he delights to see me Virtuous because he is pleas'd when he sees me Happy. And since he has created many Things which seem purely design'd for the Delight of Man, I believe he is not offended when he sees his Children solace themselves in any manner of pleasant Exercises and innocent Delights, and I think no Pleasure innocent that is to Man hurtful.

Both men, in any case, probably would have been appreciated by Thomas Jefferson and his associates on July 4, 1776, when they used the most important moment of the Declaration to pledge devotion to happiness as the prime purpose of life and liberty.

The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

James Waldo Fawcett

(Editor's Note: One of the bibliographic treasures of The Historical Society is a copy of The Works of John Woolman which once belonged to Daniel P. Bowers. It was printed in Philadelphia by Joseph Crukshank in 1774.)


More and more I come to see history as cumulative processive experience and not, say, the continual filling in of some otherwise vague and progressing line reaching out of the past toward my own sitting here, America, 1968 — the specific world through which I move. We tend to time rememberable things so that they actually can be placed as past; but I don't at all think that that's necessarily the most useful (or most real) mode of apprehension. When one begins to feel that heaven is real, and is not anything if not with him as he presently is — and that hell is as real and as equally as present — one protests the linear that can only place the known portions side by side, and wants to reject anything which does not move to keep those known portions not only available, but alive.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge becomes immediately contemporary with such words as: "Why is it that I am proud and value myself among my species? It is because I think I possess in some degree the distinguishing characteristic of a man, a taste for both the fine arts; a taste and characteristic too little valued in America, where a system
of finance has introduced law of unequal wealth; destroyed the spirit of the common industry; and planted that of lottery in the human heart.”

Such words move one away from an “interest” in history and into a region of concern where facts become nourishment and utterances a health to the people. And where facts reveal portent of such public nutriment, one who insists he is moved by such facts must bear the added responsibility of properly preserving and sharing such informations. He discovers that he wants informations forward not out of some romantic or precious personal involvement in any particular time or place, but that such informations are an ingathering to the present which is all time and all place, where people are hungry and in need of in/forming food — and those informations should be as real and as generally and appetizingly available as food.

Daniel Marder has been interested in the work of Hugh Henry Brackenridge since, at least, the preparation of his dissertation, The Best of Brackenridge, in 1962. The present volume seems to me another step in making Brackenridge more generally available; and I understand that Mr. Marder is preparing for publication an annotated edition of Incidents of the Insurrection in Western Pennsylvania in the Year 1794. It is certainly commendable that he has chosen to give Brackenridge such attention; but I must also register my disappointment that the present volume is not more complete and more thoroughly historically documented. Especially in the case of Brackenridge, the historical and literary activities are so intimately related that to speak of one at the neglect of the other is to produce a work ultimately inadequate. One might excuse the emphasis on the literary on the basis of the “format” of books included in the Twayne series; but considering the historical data Mr. Marder did include, one begins to suspect that he chose to publish in that series because the permissible length and emphasis on the literary would not demand of him a thorough familiarity with the period in which these works were written.

Mr. Marder has a tendency to accept as fact folk-lore and half-truths, such as the often told story of Brackenridge’s marrying a woman because she could leap a fence. This is a story that seems to have circulated among the legal profession, and has been told of the marriages of a number of lawyers. Mr. Marder also takes it for granted that there was a first marriage and that Henry Marie Brackenridge was a legal child of that marriage — despite the fact that Brackenridge, who wrote of his intimate life, does not mention such a marriage; the startlingly poor personal treatment of the child
Henry Marie; and the fact that the name of the woman of this assumed marriage does not first come to us until nearly one hundred years later.

When he does offer "historical" data, Mr. Marder often reveals an insufficient familiarity with the period. It is his use of generalities that gives this away. He tells of Brackenridge's defence of thirteen settlers who had squatted on land Washington had purchased from "a Colonel Groghan." The case actually involved George Croghan, the trader, a name familiar to even casual students of Western Pennsylvania history. At another point Mr. Marder terms David Bruce, "keeper of a country store near Pittsburgh." Actually, the store was in Burgettstown in Washington County, some distance from Pittsburgh, especially in that day. Footnote 32 of Chapter Three is incorrect; it states that David Bruce's Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect was published in Pittsburgh, 1801. It was published by John Colerick at Washington, Pennsylvania. Mr. Marder has it correct in the bibliography.

Certain men are exceedingly valuable as markers, essentially buoys, often because of what they do not belong to, their incapacity to join. And yet we find them intimately linked to occasions men belonged to. Such a man was Hugh Henry Brackenridge. We still need a volume clarifying his position during the Whiskey Insurrection, how he managed to be on no side and all sides. Perhaps a much more complex and studied volume on his life and work will give us the insight to greater clarity in the mass of contradictions we are still left with. We need a more presently useful view of this man whom I find private, responsible and enormously self-respecting, and yet an exceedingly intimate writer who tried to hold to his own sense despite the sometime inappropriateness (the hope of a widespread interest in literature on the frontier) and contradiction (his depreciating views of the Indians compared with the very moving account and personal risk of his activity that resulted in the narrative of Mamactaga) — a man with clear limits to his sense of possibility, he could go just so far: David Bradford took off down the Ohio while Brackenridge put his papers in order and read Virgil, knowing troops sent to put down the Insurrection marched toward the city slashing the bushes and shouting his name.

*Pittsburgh*

Ron Caplan