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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“The Cobb House: A Biography of A Place”

written by

David Alan Bagley

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for completion of the
Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

third reader

honors program director

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The Cobb House: A Biography of a Place

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The Cobb House: A Biography of a Place

Thesis Project

David Alan Bagley, Ouachita Baptist University

The Cobb House: A Biography of A Place

"So these were and are the dominant influences in the life of rural Southerners- this sense of place, coming out of displacement, indentured servants, migrations, and the finding of this sense of place in the farmers, the homesteads, the community. And this sense of place became sacred." ¹

A house is not usually thought of as a living, breathing entity, but with the inhalations of new occupants and the exhalations of old residents, suddenly a house becomes more than brick and mortar, more than shingles and nails, more than the landscape on which it stands. From the laying of the first stone, it breathes its first breath, takes its first step; and magically, a house is constant, viable, and lives forever. How does one tell the story of such a place- a place that defines the culture of the South in general and Arkansas in particular. Perhaps one begins with the birth of the house and tells of its entire life. By writing the story that a particular place tells, the biographer makes that place a symbol with eternal immortality. Such a symbol was born in 1860 in the small Southern town of Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Today, 141 years later, this symbol is known as the Cobb House, and it remains a symbol of Arkansas and the South.

A biography is written because the subject is significant. The Cobb House is important because it reflects a sense of place that can be described or defined in terms of Arkansas, which is part of the Upland South. The sense of place this house provides can also be defined by the major events in American history that have directly affected Arkansas. The house defines life in the South and, therefore, in Arkansas; and the life of the South and of Arkansas also defines the home. The biography of a house should not only be told through historical events that place it in context, but also through the lives of

¹ V.S. Naipaul, A Turn in the South. (New York: Vintage International, 1989) 254.

the people who lived there. This study of The Cobb House provides a sense of place for the South and also uncovers the American experience in Arkansas, starting in 1860 and continuing through the present. "A powerful feeling for state and locality" has prevailed throughout these years in the American experience, and "Southerners continue to think of themselves primarily as citizens of a state" or as Arkansans.²

Attempts to study the history of Arkansas exist in several academic disciplines. Already, changes in music, education, politics, and religion have been examined in order to illuminate the Arkansas experience. While the study of these disciplines has made significant contributions to understanding the evolution of Arkansas and the South, descriptions of the lives of people from a common place told through letters, photographs, and other memorabilia, placed in the historical context of existing information, provide even greater insight into the lives of Arkansans and Southerners and of Arkansas and the South as unique people and places. The biography of the Cobb House told through historical events and real life experiences provides the Arkansan and the Southerner a renewed sense of place and origin, a place that many people today still call home.

Three major time periods give the Cobb House its sense of place. After its building in 1860, the Cobb House spent its early years in an unstable South until 1879, a total of nineteen years when three different families owned the house. Because several families occupied the house so quickly, little information exists concerning their lives, and this study uses historical facts in assessing the content of their lives while they lived there. Following this time of instability came a long period of stability for the Cobb House, with one family, the Weber family, owning the home from 1879 until 1958, a

²A History of the Old South. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966) 5.

period of 79 years. This family contributed several letters, photographs, and newspaper articles that bring to life the stories of Arkadelphians, Arkansans, and Southerners.

Finally, another period of instability lasted from 1958 until the present day for the Cobb House. During these 43 years, three different families again owned the house, and historical texts aid in the process of demonstrating the sense of place that the Cobb House provides. Discovering this sense of place, of Arkansas and the South, merits the study of *The Cobb House*.

James Elder Cobb built the Cobb House at 307 North Sixth Street in Arkadelphia, Arkansas circa 1860, and he built the home using an architectural style from Savannah, Georgia, called a raised cottage saltbox. Soon after Cobb built the house, the Arkansas Methodist Conference sent him to his first appointment as pastor of the First Methodist Church of Camden, where membership grew to "79 white and 27 colored."³ Cobb became a leader in the Arkansas Methodist Conference throughout his early years in Arkansas and served as its secretary from 1862-1879. He helped to organize several Methodist publications such as "The Ouachita Conference Journal, the forerunner of The Arkansas Methodist."⁴ James Cobb sold the house in 1869 to become an administrator at Homer Male College, a Methodist institution in Louisiana. Cobb sold the house in 1869 to Major J.A. Hardage, who later sold it in 1874 to Dr. C.A. Gannt.

Research concerning the life of James Cobb is inadequate in its portrayal of Southern life in the early 1860s. What was life in the South like? What were the topics of conversations held inside the Cobb House walls? What events could have been

³ Spore, Kenneth L. A History of the First Methodist Church of Camden, Arkansas. (Little Rock: Arkansas History Commission, 1944) 20.

⁴ Ibid.

discussed during this time period? Why was the house sold so quickly, and why did it change ownership three times during a fourteen-year period? The answers to these questions can be found by examining the lack of stability in the South from 1860-1879. This period of instability for the Cobb House provides the historian with a sense of the social upheaval that occurred during the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period. From 1861-1874, the United States and indeed the South experienced an internal war that is exhibited in the instability of the Cobb House ownership. The small structure became a symbol and a portrait of Southern life.

President Abraham Lincoln was elected November 6, 1860, and before his inauguration, Arkansas's sister Southern state, South Carolina, became the first Southern state to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860. The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, with a Confederate attack on the federal garrison at Fort Sumter, South Carolina and "the Civil War passed over the South like a giant tidal wave, cracking many structures so fatally that it was only a matter of time before they fell to pieces."⁵

The state of Arkansas was deeply affected by the Civil War and was a divided state during wartime. By the time the Cobb House was built in 1860, Arkansas was not a mature member of the economy in the South because the state was divided physically and culturally by a swampy eastern border and a mountainous west. Further, Arkansas was a divided state because its citizens were not devoted to the Union as Northern farmers were, and many did not have the Southern divisional feeling that drove planters and farmers whose lives were based upon slavery and the cotton economy.⁶ Finally, "the

⁵ Anne F. Scott, *The Southern Lady*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) 81.

⁶ Michael B. Dougan, *Arkansas Odyssey*. (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Company, 1993) 193.

rhetoric of Southern nationalism carried the day after the firing on Fort Sumter. . . but in the aftermath of the attack, many began to have second thoughts."⁷

With the underdeveloped Arkansas economy and differing opinions of Arkansans about the war, the "Rebel Cause languished in spite of the heroic efforts by General Thomas C. Hindman to put Arkansas on a war footing."⁸ Arkansas suffered from joining the Southern cause, and the division was, in part, due to geographical and cultural determinations. This division caused guerrilla hostilities throughout Arkansas, and the War produced severe destruction, particularly in the Ozark region.

Henry M. Rector became governor of Arkansas on November 15, 1860, and he formally began the secessionist movement in the state by arguing that the Union dissolved because the North had supported a candidate for President, Abraham Lincoln, who was divisive. Farmers in the cotton South followed Rector's leadership and believed "that the time had come" for war and "cheered the action of South Carolina in seceding."⁹ The cotton culture had provided much of the basis for the secession of Arkansas from the Union. An Arkansas Gazette article claimed that Arkansas "should not falter for one moment to seek the destiny that is linked to the other cotton-growing states or pause to deliberate the consequences that may follow."¹⁰ These consequences lasted throughout the war and post-war eras and had a direct affect on the life of Clark County and Arkadelphia.

One can only imagine what occurred within the Cobb House by examining the events taking place in Arkadelphia and throughout Clark County during the Civil War

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. 194.

¹⁰ Ibid.

and Reconstruction Years. Most battles took place east of Arkansas. Clark County escaped much of the actual fighting during the war; however, a majority of the Clark County population was in favor of secession and joined the Confederacy. Division remained for the people of Clark County and Arkansas because some of its residents were opposed to secession and joined the Union. Throughout most of the war, those residents were either forced to be silent or had to leave their homes. Toward the end of the war, more residents started to support the Union, and the instability of Clark County and Arkansas further increased.¹¹

Very few armies came through Clark County until September of 1863. Confederate General Sterling Price retreated from Little Rock to Clark County when Union General Steele invaded the state. Price remained in Clark County through the winter of 1863-64. The Union Army followed General Price, and this became the only time the federal army presided in Clark County.

Arkadelphia supported the Civil War effort in several ways. Its small factories produced "salt, clothing, and ammunitions."¹² A federal blockade of the Ouachita River created a shortage of guns. This blockade also created a shortage of gun powder and more importantly, a shortage of labor. Because of the shortage labor, the Confederate Army needed every available man. As a result, the Army recruited children to work in factories. In the Arkansas Gazette, on August 14, 1862, Colonel John H. Dunnigan, Chief of Ordnance, advertised jobs making cartridge boxes, requesting children willing to move to Arkadelphia to do some of the work.¹³

¹¹ Clark County Arkansas. (Arkadelphia: Clark County Historical Association, 1992) 13-15.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 13.

As the Civil War progressed, Arkansas soldiers from Clark County left their homes, jobs, and families. Many of these families became destitute because of the war, and many of the soldiers never returned. Others, however, came to Arkansas and settled in Clark County.¹⁴ Many Arkansans refused to accept defeat after General Robert E. Lee's surrender of the Confederacy to the Union. These Arkansans "gloried in the 'Lost Cause' and used two of its symbols, 'Dixie' and the Confederate flag, as signs of protest against dominant American ideals."¹⁵

James Cobb owned the house at 307 North Sixth Street throughout the bitter Civil War. In studying his life, one can see that he was an influential part of Arkadelphia society. His obituary stated that he was "eloquent, well-educated, conscientious, kind and obliging, and that he did a great good in the world" of Arkadelphia and Arkansas. He sold the interest in his Methodist publication, The Arkansas Christian Advocate, and in 1869, he left the house and Arkansas and went further South for Louisiana.

In 1869, during the turbulent Reconstruction years, Cobb sold the house to Major Joseph Addison Hardage. Major J.A. Hardage was born in Lincoln County, Tennessee, and married Mary Lovelace from Hallifax County, Virginia. They lived in Hot Springs County in Arkansas for a year in 1851 before moving to Arkadelphia in 1852, seventeen years before they bought the Cobb House. He became a farmer in Arkadelphia and was a Major in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

Another owner of the Cobb House occupied the home throughout Reconstruction in 1874 and the period following the Reconstruction through 1879. Hardage sold the house to Dr. C.A. Gannt, who was born in Columbia County, Arkansas, and later moved

¹⁴Ibid. 13-18

¹⁵Michael B. Dougan, Arkansas Odyssey. (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Company, 1993) 231.

to Clark County. He represented Clark County during two terms of the Arkansas legislature and served as mayor of Arkadelphia.

These first three owners were likely exposed to the turmoil caused by the Civil War and ten year period labeled the Reconstruction. In Arkansas, Reconstruction "was a period of great social, political, and economic change."¹⁶ For ten years, the state worked to change its attitudes toward racism and made unsuccessful attempts at two-party politics. The Reconstruction included a decade of economic failures. In 1867, the federal military ruled Arkansas, along with all other former Confederate states except Tennessee. Blacks voted for the first time during the election for a constitutional convention. In 1868, the convention wrote a constitution that gave blacks the right to vote and full civil rights. Arkansas created tax-supported public schools and held a state election. The new constitution was ratified. The new Arkansas legislature met and voted to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which guaranteed civil rights for blacks. On June 22, 1868, Arkansas was readmitted to the Union. Many whites opposed the military control of Arkansas and Northern rule they felt was based on black votes. Opposition groups such as the Ku Klux Klan were organized secretly to intimidate blacks through violence.

During Reconstruction, the Arkansas state government established free public schools, founded the University of Arkansas, established a school for the deaf, protected the rights of black citizens, prosecuted the Ku Klux Klan, provided for payments of the state's debts, and increased financial aid to the building of railroads and levees.

¹⁶ Ibid. 235

Obviously some progress was being made, but the South, Arkansas, and Clark County remained in a state of instability.¹⁷

While little is known of the Hardage and Gannt families, the inference can be made that they, too, experienced the political, social, and economic distress that Arkansas and much of the South experienced from 1860-1879. J.A. Hardage was a Civil War Major, so his occupancy of a home in the South was likely difficult when placed in the historical context of the Reconstruction. The Cobb, Hardage, and Gannt families became significant because all three owners owned the house for a period of only fourteen years. Placed in this context, the Cobb House became a symbol of the instability of Arkansas and the South during the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction. During this time, the population in Arkansas and the South subsisted in a state of flux, and the moving of occupants in and out of the Cobb House is indicative of this general Arkansan and Southern trend.

Following Reconstruction, Arkansas moved forward as a frontier state, while other states declined in population growth. Population in states surrounding Arkansas increased by one percent from 1880 to 1900, but Arkansas doubled cotton production from 1877 to 1890 and the population increased sixty-five percent. With new railroad construction, the small towns of Arkansas began to flourish. It was during this time of population growth that Louis Weber moved from Charleston, South Carolina, to Arkadelphia, Arkansas.¹⁸

When Louis Weber bought the Cobb House in 1879 from Dr. Gannt, Arkansas and the South began moving out of the Reconstruction Period into the era known as the

¹⁷ Ibid. 235-264.

¹⁸ Ibid.

New South. The Cobb House became known as the "Old Weber House" for the 79 years following the purchase. Much is known of the Weber family and its contributions to the city of Arkadelphia, the state of Arkansas, and the South. Louis was the middle child of three brothers from Charleston, South Carolina. His older brother, George Weber, "went to Virginia Saturday, July 13, 1861,"¹⁹ to join the Confederate Army. Louis's mother and father past away and Louis, at age fifteen, took care for his younger twelve year old brother, James Franklin Weber. During the early years of the Civil War, Louis worked in a drugstore in Charleston. After two years, Louis also joined the Confederate Army, as his diary states, on August 16, 1863: "I this day report for duty to Captain G.H. Walter, Commander/Washington Artillery, Army of the Confederate States, camped now near Jacksonville, S.C. on the line of the Savannah R.R."²⁰ Because of poor health and weak eyesight, in February of 1864, he became the Hospital Steward of the Washington Artillery. Louis writes in his diary about the Evacuation of Adams Run and the beginning of a retrograde movement to North Carolina. On February 18, 1865, he wrote, "Evacuation of Charleston by the Confederates and entry of the Union troops. . . we are on the retreat. . . camp tonight twenty miles from Summerville, South Carolina." On May 2, 1865, Louis received parole and started home for Charleston, a trip that took him nine days and almost 105 miles of walking. He was registered in Charleston as a paroled enemy of the United States, and on May 13, 1865, "certain circumstances compelled" Louis to "take the 'oath of allegiance' to the United States of America." He wrote in his diary, "I am now a loyal citizen."²¹

¹⁹ Genealogical study by Blanche Dews, unpublished. 2000.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

The diary Louis left behind tells more of the biography of the South and of a life that he later brings to Arkansas. The Civil War caused instability in his family's life and soon caused instability in his own life. He left behind the story of having to take care of a family member when an older brother leaves to participate in the Civil War. He tells us the story of the South during the Civil War through his own life, and it is no surprise that he would one day be a stabilizing factor of the Cobb House during the New South era.

Louis's brother George began a mercantile drug store business, and in 1873, Louis replied to George's request to move to Arkadelphia to become a partner in the business with him and younger James. Louis agreed, and his contributions to Arkadelphia and Arkansas began. The mercantile business became known as the Weber Brothers Store, which reflected the positive economic changes that were occurring in Arkansas, part of the New South. During the 1870's and 1880's villages, towns, and cities began a period of prosperity. "The town became the home of new peoples and a new society. Towns became the place where a new culture emerged."²² Towns benefited from the new economic burst in Arkansas. New jobs arose in these small towns through commerce, and the Weber Brothers Store is a perfect example of the new economic opportunity and progress in the small towns of Arkansas. Places such as Arkadelphia reached urban status between 1880 and 1900.²³ "The vision that inspired the Southern businessman was that of a South modeled upon the industrial Northeast."²⁴

Louis married Susan Thomas in 1875, and George, on a trip to St. Louis to buy things for the Weber Brothers Store, wrote to Lewis, "I presume when this is received,

²² Carl H. Moneyhon, Arkansas and the New South. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997) 41.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ The American South Comes of Age. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986) 10.

Louis is a married man, and knows what it is to go through a 'Mill.'"²⁵ On his trip to St. Louis, George Weber found that the people of St. Louis "look[ed] upon country merchants as 'baits,'"²⁶ probably because they considered Southerners to be gullable.

George Weber died in 1884, and his death left their three sons parentless at the ages of ten, five, and three. In his will, he requested that Louis raise the children, and Louis did, along with his large family. Louis and Susan Weber's seven children were born in the Cobb house as were the children of their daughters Ida and Margaret Weber. Margaret or "Maggie" was born, lived her entire life, and died in the home at 307 North Sixth Street.

Louis Weber became an outstanding citizen in Arkadelphia and gained the respect of many of his fellow citizens. Louis sold the Weber Brothers Store to his brothers-in-law and later became the bookkeeper in this new store that became widely known as The Racket Store. Louis was dedicated to education, and he served the local school board for thirty-seven years. For over twenty years, he served as their secretary. He was also active in the founding of Ouachita College in 1886. Ouachita College's newspaper, The Signal, reported that "He was a member of the Arkadelphia committee which worked to locate the Baptist college in Arkadelphia." The committee's "success was a tribute to the splendid work of Mr. Weber."²⁷ He was also the mayor of Arkadelphia until his death on May 3, 1919. In his funeral service, Louis was described by the pastor as an "influential man" and as "a citizen who supported everything that was for the moral good of the community." He "left to his friends and to his family the memory of a noble life. . . not

²⁵ Genealogical study by Blanche Dews, unpublished

²⁶ Letter from George Weber to Louis and James Weber, 10 March 1875, private collection of George and Blanche Dews.

²⁷ Weber collection, Ouachita Baptist University, Riley Hickingbotham Library, Special Collections.

of a church with a tower as high as Babel; not of an edifice as costly as Solomon's Temple, but the memory of a good life." The pastor's final words of Louis Weber were: "I am inclined to think that the world does not know when it suffers its greatest losses. Their names are not always found in the obituary columns of our daily papers; their deaths are not flashed to the four corners of the earth for publication; their careers are not as dazzling as those of Napoleon or Bismarck, they pass away almost unobserved-they are the world's good men."²⁸

The Weber family owned the Cobb House until 1958, a period of stability for the country as well as for the Cobb House. Weber ownership of the Cobb House gave a sense of family, cohesiveness, and unity in Southern and Arkansan culture. During the period of time between 1879 and 1958, Southerners and other Americans became united. No longer did the period of social upheaval and internal conflict persist. The Weber family history in the house encompassed many changes on the American scene: the Spanish-American War, World War I, the years of the Great Depression, and World War II. The unifying effects on the South and Arkansas that were created by these major events are symbolized in the constancy of the Cobb House ownership by the Weber family.

"The Spanish-American War (1898) had been an important step toward integrating the South back into the Union."²⁹ Many Arkansans volunteered during the "splendid little war," and this helped to unify the South with America. These volunteers were needed because 25% of volunteers failed the physical. No Arkansans saw action,

²⁸ Eulogy of Louis Weber, 5 May 1919, Private Collection of George and Blanche Dews.

²⁹ Carl H. Moneyhon, Arkansas and the New South. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997) 105.

but 54 men died in camp because of malaria and poor sanitation.³⁰ Arkansans had been united in their first war effort.

Large numbers of southern men enlisted to serve their country during World War I. This helped to nationalize Southerners even more than the Spanish-American War did. Southerners and Arkansans saw themselves as a part of their nation, which was working to stop the German forces in Europe. World War I began in Europe in August of 1914 with the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. At first, England, France, and Russia joined forces against Germany and Austria. Then, in the spring of 1917, German submarines attacked American ships. As a result, America entered the war and allied with England, France, and Russia. America readied itself for war and sent soldiers to European trenches. The war ended in November of 1918. Even though America was not involved for a long period of time, she definitely influenced the outcome in favor of England and France.

Most Southerners and Arkansans were united, patriotic, and supportive after the United States entered what became known as The Great War. They practiced "wheatless Mondays" and "meatless Tuesdays," fasting from wheat and meat on Mondays and Tuesdays to provide more food for soldiers. Arkansans bought nearly two million dollars in war bonds, and food prices went up, benefiting many farmers. About 72,000 Arkansans served in the armed forces during America's involvement in World War I.

One of these Arkansans was George Spragins Dews, who lived in the Cobb House from 1917, after marrying the youngest daughter of Louis Weber, Margaret Weber, until he died in 1958. Louis and Susan Weber lived with George and Margaret Dews in the Cobb House until their deaths in 1919 and 1935, respectively. George Spragins Dews

³⁰ Arkansas Odyssey, 308.

was from Texas and later moved to Camden, Arkansas. He went to high school in Arkadelphia and went overseas to fight in World War I in January of 1918 until November of 1918. In the war he served as a private and as a member of an army company from Chicago, where he went for basic training.

When he returned to Arkadelphia after the war, he began working for the railway express, loading and unloading boxes from trains. He worked for a flour mill and later worked for a savings and loan. After working for the savings and loan, he worked for the Arkadelphia Chamber of Commerce for the rest of his life. George promoted Arkadelphia, and one example of his service to Arkadelphia was his help in starting the construction of the DeGray dam. He met with the Corps of Engineers while working for the Chamber of Commerce to help facilitate the dam.

George and Margaret had two children, George Spragins Dews, Jr., who died a little over a year after his birth, and Charles Weber Dews, who fought in World War II. Margaret worked at the public library after attending Ouachita College in 1910. George, Margaret, and their son Charles lived in the house together until Margaret died in 1946. During the period of time from 1917 through 1946, they had lived through not only World War I and the Spanish-American War, but also the Great Depression and World War II.³¹

The Great Depression was triggered by the stock market crash of October 29, 1929, now known in history as Black Tuesday. This became one of the greatest economic disasters in American history. One might expect that the South as well as other parts of the country would be destabilized; however, the South became unified through its struggles in agriculture and an interest in politics. As a result of the drought of 1930 in

the South and the march of irate farmers through the city streets of England, Arkansas, Southern attention was focused on Arkansas.

Banks failed and schools closed as a result of the Great Depression. In May of 1931, unpaid school warrants amounted to five million dollars. In February of 1932, it had risen to thirty-two million. By 1934, average teachers' salaries were \$489. The drought and hunger focused the attention of Southerners toward the political scene. In the midst of all this turmoil, Arkansans became united in their support the presidential nominee, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his campaign against Herbert Hoover in 1932. Arkansans disliked Herbert Hoover after he failed to promise any relief to the suffering people of their state. Roosevelt promised a "New Deal" to bring the country out of the Depression by creating new agencies. The Works Progress Administration, one of Roosevelt's new agencies built roads, buildings, and lakes all over Arkansas. On the state level, Judge Julius Marion Futrell won the election for governor by promising to cut state expenses by 50%. The year 1932 also witnessed Hattie Caraway's election. In 1931 Hattie Caraway's husband, a junior senator from Arkansas, died, and she was appointed to fill his United States Senate seat. She served as the first woman senator from Arkansas. In the January special election, she ran as a candidate to serve the eleven months remaining in his term and won.³²

Susan Weber, George, Margaret, and young Charles Dews were affected by the Great Depression. Milk became expensive as did other food products, and the family bought a cow to produce their milk. George's niece, Annie, moved to Arkadelphia to live at the Cobb House after her father's death. This displays the sense of unity within the

³¹ George and Blanche Dews, interview by author. Dallas, TX, 30 September 2000.

³² Michael B. Dougan, *Arkansas Odyssey*. (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Company, 1993) 415-425.

extended family in the towns of Arkansas and the South. Families pulled together to work and to live through some of the most difficult years in the South. The Cobb House remained a stabilized unit and its constancy defines the atmosphere of the South during the horrible years from 1929 through 1935, the years of the Great Depression. Mobility decreased, many families began to stay in one place.

After the Great Depression came another major event in American history during the stabilization period of the Cobb House. World War II in Europe began in 1939 with the German invasion of Poland. Britain and France declared war against Germany and Italy, however, there was not much fighting until the spring of 1940. Hitler invaded Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June of 1941. After the Soviet Union attack, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and brought America into the war. Arkansas's main contribution to the war effort was manpower."³³ In all, 55,748 men enlisted, and 138,897 were drafted. There were 4,611 deaths of Arkansans as a result of the war.

Many Arkansans contributed to the war effort. Buying war bonds became a way to help pay for the cost of war. School children bought twenty-five cent stamps that they collected until they had enough to buy a twenty-five dollar war bond. Children also helped by collecting scrap metal and rubber to use in making weapons. Women would go home after working all day in factories and knit sweaters for soldiers. Families planted "victory gardens" to help grow enough food for the country. Coffee, tea, sugar,

³³ Ibid. 459

meat, gas, and tires were rationed. People could buy only small amounts of these things each month with ration books issued by the government.³⁴

The entry of the United States into the war sent one man from the Cobb House in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, to North Africa. Charles Dews, the son of George and Margaret Dews, lived in the Cobb House from his birth in 1922 until 1941 and again from 1945 through 1951. He joined the Arkansas National Guard in Arkadelphia and moved to Little Rock in 1940. He was stationed there for six months before being transferred to Tacoma, Washington. While in Washington, he was visiting a friend in the hospital when a radio announced that the Japanese had bombed the Hawaiian Islands. The radio played an announcement that all army and navy personnel should immediately report to their naval officer. Charles Dews called Camp Murray in Tacoma a "beehive of activity."³⁵ He was sent to the Elusian Islands to serve for fourteen months. Charles became involved in the invasion of Italy and was in Northeastern Italy when the war was over. The next day his commanding officers told him to turn in his equipment and to pack because an airplane would be landing the next day to take him to Rome. Charles stayed in Rome for a month waiting for orders to return to the United States. He flew to Brazil and then to Miami, Florida, where he spent two weeks. In Florida, he was discharged and traveled to the Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. Charles started home on the next train to Texarkana in July of 1945. When he returned to Arkadelphia, he became a student at Henderson Teachers College. With one semester to finish in

³⁴ Harri T. Baker and Jane Browning, *An Arkansas History*. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997) 322.

³⁵ Interview with George and Blanche Dews

1947, he married Blanche Dews. They lived in the Cobb House until 1951 with Charles's father George Dews.³⁶

Where World War I, World War II, and the great Depression had united Americans, Southerners, and Arkansans in their unified efforts to overcome adversities locally, nationally, and internationally, the 1950's revived a period of instability and turmoil, especially in the South and in Arkansas. The Cobb House again symbolizes this period of instability with the house being sold in 1958 and ownership changing three times until the present day. In 1958, Ralph Williams bought the home and later sold it to Anna Bass. Dr. Tom Greer bought and renovated the home in 1987, and Ouachita Baptist University bought the home in 2000. What caused the chaotic change and time of instability for the Cobb House and the South in the 1950's and beyond? What were some of the rapid cultural change[s] in the region since World War II?³⁷

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court answered this question when it held that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," reversing the "separate but equal" doctrine the court had adopted in 1896 with the Plessy v. Ferguson decision. This became known as the Brown v. Board of Education decision, and it changed the atmosphere and climate of the South and Arkansas for decades.

"The South underwent a second Reconstruction between 1954 and 1976. The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution began to be enforced seriously and uniformly for the first time along with the federal Civil Rights laws passed during the first Reconstruction immediately after the Civil War and new laws passed in the 1960's."³⁸

In 1955, the Interstate Commerce Commission ordered an end to segregation in interstate transportation. As a result of the Supreme Court Decision in 1954 and the

³⁶ George and Blanche Dews, interview by author. Dallas, TX, 21 March 2001.

³⁷ *The Southern Quarterly*, Fall 1998. 160.

Interstate Commerce Commission intervention, a wave of protests throughout the South arose against the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Earl Warren, the United Nations, President Eisenhower, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Nearly all Southern senators supported the "Southern manifesto which declared the Court had overstepped its authority by interfering with the South's social arrangements."³⁹ For twenty years after the Brown decision, visitors read signs in Arkansas that stated "Impeach Earl Warren."⁴⁰

Across the state extremists began to organize. One extremist group was the White Citizens Council, and it argued that the Brown decision was unconstitutional. Segregationist James D. Johnson proposed an amendment ratified into the Arkansas Constitution in 1956. The 44th amendment to the Arkansas Constitution stated that a state could block the decision of the Supreme Court. The amendment remained in the constitution as an embarrassment to the state until it was repealed in 1990. This caused Civil Rights attorneys to hold the state responsible for continuing a history of racial discrimination.

Violence broke out on September 23, 1957, at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Even though black students had finally been admitted, school officials sent them home at noon because of the angry crowd that assembled outside the building. President Eisenhower sent a division of the United States Army to Little Rock on September 24, 1957, and Little Rock Central remained under the control of federal troops throughout most of the school year. That summer, the school board returned to the federal court asking for a thirty month delay in desegregation, which was rejected.

³⁸ Arkansas Odyssey, 493

³⁹ Michael B. Dougan, Arkansas Odyssey. (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Company, 1993) 494.

Governor Faubus shut down Little Rock's schools for the 1958-59 school year. Because of the closing of public schools, many private academies were started. Segregationists even attacked newspapers like the Arkansas Gazette for a moderate opinion concerning segregation. Businesses were warned that those advertising in the Arkansas Gazette could expect retaliation. The Gazette lost 18% of its circulation and one million dollars in revenues.⁴¹

The writer cannot assert a direct parallel between the instability brought about by racial tension in the South and Arkansas in the 1950's and the frequent occupant change in the Cobb House from 1958 until the present. The writer can assert that the South became more mobile during these periods of social change. Just as the Civil War had caused a period of instability in the South and the Cobb House, so did the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The Civil War and Reconstruction destroyed slavery and made it illegal, and this changed the nature of the South. The 1954 Supreme Court decision made Plessy v. Ferguson illegal and created another social upheaval. The house changed ownership three times during both of these chaotic times in Southern history.

The Cobb House tells the story of the South and of Arkansas. The biography of such a place gives life to the evolution of a sense of place, a sense of home, and a sense of origin to which every Southerner and Arkansan can relate. The period of 1860-1879 was indeed an unstable one, one marked by the destruction of the South and the forced Reconstruction of Southern morale. The Cobb House itself became an unstable landmark

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. 501-502.

with the departure of old faces and the arrival of new faces three times during its early years.

During the years from 1879-1958, Arkansas and the South became unified, and the Cobb House, alive in the spirit of community, became a symbol of Southern constancy and unity. One family, the Weber family, owned the house during these unifying years. This family faced hard times through the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, and the Great Depression, but the Cobb House still illuminates the South as a sacred place with a nucleus of family and brotherhood.

The Cobb House identified Arkansas and the South as places of instability from 1958 through today due to social changes during the Civil Rights movement. The Brown v. Board Supreme Court decision that overturned the "separate but equal" clause of the Plessy v. Ferguson decision caused an uproar in Arkansas and the South. The Cobb House, too, experienced another time of instability indicative of this place and time as it changed owners three more times.

Through the biography of the Cobb House the story of an entire southern world is told. The life of the Cobb House tells of the greatest wars of modern history and provides insight into the world of the true Arkansan or Southerner. It creates a sense of place, a sense of Arkansas, a sense of the South.

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