The Sackett Brothers

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I first encountered the Sackett brothers two years ago. I had been working in the Willamette University Archives for almost a year when I was assigned to organize and digitize a collection of around 800 black and white negatives and glass slides.[1] It was a daunting project. According to the finding aid from the archives, a man named Vernor Martin Sackett took the photographs. He was born right before the twentieth century, grew up in Oregon's Willamette Valley, and attended Willamette in the 1920s. His brother, Sheldon Frederick Sackett, only a few years younger, is featured prominently in the collection (I would later discover that there was another brother, Leland, who also attended Willamette but never graduated). Both Vernor and Sheldon eventually married women they met and dated at Willamette. After graduating, Sheldon went on to become a newspaper publisher on the West Coast. Vernor lived in Salem for the rest of his life, and became an insurance salesman. And that is all I knew about them, but I became obsessed with the collection and with the Sacketts.

In the beginning, the majority of my curiosity probably developed because of that mystery. There are hundreds of photographs in this collection—photographs that show Vernor's family and friends, his home and school, his adventures and his girlfriends. This collection is a window into how one man saw the world and what he chose to capture about it. The mystery is that even with all these intimate photographs, we do not know a lot, or really anything, about Vernor. And more than that, these photographs are beautiful. Vernor had a talent for taking photographs. The finding aid from the archives dates the photographs to between 1920 and 1929. Most of the photographs appeared to be taken between those dates. But if Vernor was such a prolific photographer (and in the early 1920s, it was not very common for a young person to have what seems like a lot of access to cameras), I have constantly wondered if these really are

[1] The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.

his only photographs. It seems strange to me that by the 1930s Vernor seemingly stopped taking photographs.

Because of the professional quality of the photographs along with the potential for an immense amount of information that could be gleaned, from my perspective, the collection deserved to be preserved and published online so that Vernor's work could be seen and displayed. When I decided I wanted to write my senior history thesis on the collection of photographs, my adviser asked me "What is so special about this collection? What makes it different than all the other collections of early twentieth century black and white photography?" I honestly didn't know the answer. This is when the scope of the project really hit me. Because not only did I not have an answer besides that I just loved the images, but I also didn't even know *how* to begin to answer that question. In Historiography, I approached the research through the history of photography. I attempted to figure out where to begin that process of understanding how to create meaning and construct a history from a collection of photographs. But while that research was extraordinarily helpful, I realized that it was not the beginning of the story that I am trying to tell, the story of the Sackett brothers told through the lens of Vernor's collection of photographs. That story begins in the archives.

In "Touching the Void: Affective History and the Impossible,"[2] historian Emily Robinson dissects contemporary academic literature on archival research. She specifically evaluates the experience of historians working in archives and asks "*Why* do historians feel the desire to reconstruct the past? *What* gives the impression that this might be possible? And—if we accept that some have managed to free themselves of positivist 'delusions'—*why* do they continue to

[2] Emily Robinson, "Touching the Void: Affective History and the Impossible," *Rethinking History* 14, no. 4 (December 2010): 503-520.

pursue a past they know to be unreachable and unrepresentable?"[3] We read this essay in Historiography, and it has stuck with me because the Sacketts are not well known people (or so I thought when I first encountered the photographs), and there are very few primary source records with which to work. But there are 800 images depicting their lives, from pictures of their family to their dates with various women; there are photographs of their adventures to Oregon's coast, to the Redwood Forest, and to the Wallowa mountains. There are even pictures of Vernor serving in World War I. Later, I would find frankly disturbing pictures of their fraternity at Willamette hazing new members. These are not posed pictures in studios; these are intimate snapshots of their personal lives and insights into how they lived and saw the world in the early twentieth century. I have been staring at these images for two years—how can I not know them? But this is precisely the paradox Robinson writes about. I may have access to their personal lives (and whether Vernor intended for this or not is another element of this research that will need to be addressed), and I can speculate about these brothers infinitely, but I do not know who they are. With archival characters in general, it is uncertain if that is even possible. Besides not knowing even the general biography of Vernor of his family, there's little that even the archives knows about the collection.

Willamette's official university archives were not constructed until 2006. Vernor's collection came in at that time along with other photographs that Professor Roger Hull had in the Art History department, but we do not know how the photographs ended up at Willamette. We do not know who left them or for what purpose. We also do not know if they chose only certain photographs of Vernor's to share. I suspect that the collection was carefully curated. At this point, I can only speculate about why these images were donated, what photographs may have

[3] Robinson, "Touching the void," 504.

been left out, and for what purpose. Many of the questions I have about the Sackett brothers will go unanswered.

This archival experience is further complicated by two factors. The first is that these are not even photographs (although I use that term interchangeably with "negatives," "pictures," and "images" for the sake of the writing), they are negatives. The image is not fully visible until it is processed. The second is that we live in a digital age, and slowly, archival material is increasingly digitized and accessed digitally. Whoever researches these men in the future or whoever just encounters these photographs will do so online. They will most likely never hold these negatives and be able to physically encounter the brothers in this form that was left behind after they died. Sean Edging (the other archives intern who helped digitize the photographs) and I will probably be the only ones who physically engaged with the negatives. Contemporary historians of photography are asking how this digital age challenges traditional archival research because there are hundreds if not thousands of these personal collections being digitized around the world. In "A Few Too Many Photographs? Indexing Digital Histories,"[4] historian Gail Baylis addresses this problem, and asks what research in the digital era does to the materiality of photographs, and whether viewing the photograph removed from its physical location in the archives changes how it is interpreted. Baylis argues that this matter arises because "a photograph by itself cannot tell us much; its meaning is always context driven."[5] If it is true that meaning cannot be derived from the image alone, then the second obstacle for the historian is to find the historical context surrounding the image. Baylis argues that this task does not necessarily have to be made more difficult by the digital collection, and that "by paying attention to where and how the historical photograph as digital image appears it becomes possible to

[4] Gail Baylis, "A Few Too Many Photographs? Indexing Digital Histories," *History of Photography* 38, no. 1 (February 2014): 3-20.
[5] Baylis, "A Few Too Many Photographs?," 4.

deduce whether it is capable of carrying a form of historicity."[6] Baylis extends her argument by claiming that these digital collections, like the Sackett collection, have the potential to create a new form of materiality. According to Baylis, "the historical photograph carries with it a back-story of cultural use," that is just as important as the image itself.[7] Given this task, then the third obstacle for the historian who has found herself within a digital archive collection is to figure out how to reconcile the primary source materiality of the images with the fact that these images cannot exist without their context, and the Sackett collection appears with very little context. It is also important to for me to acknowledge my own historical and academic perspective. When I develop the context for these photographs, I will do so in a way that has been constructed by my own experiences and education.

At this point, it is important to understand how photography developed into the early twentieth century, to understand the historical context that shaped the day Vernor bought or received his first camera. The technology was officially introduced at the French Academy in 1839. The first photograph was originally attributed to Louis Daguerre (French), but Nicephore Niépce (also French) and William Henry Fox Talbot (English) had also successfully created photographs in the few years before Daguerre announced his process. In the original photographic processes, the images took hours to expose. Those exposures were quickly shortened to a few minutes as the technology spread around the world. The difficulty in creating sharp images under the technical demands of the medium accounts for the stiffness that characterizes nineteenth century photography.

While the medium was born in the nineteenth century, historians now agree that photography—historically and theoretically—has roots dating back to Plato and the shadows on

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[6] Ibid., 4.
[7] Baylis, "A Few Too Many Photographs?," 4.

the cave. Daguerre, Niépce, and Talbot all "shied away from explaining photography as an invention wrought by human hands," but insisted "that photography originated in nature and was disclosed by nature."[8] Photography, or light writing as it was named, is pictured as the final development in the long history of artists and scientists attempting to fix images created naturally by light on paper. The history of photography was restrained from being classified as solely a nineteenth century product of industrialization. Before the twentieth century, those who wrote about photography situated it "in natural history rather than in human history," thereby distancing "the medium from technological history as commonly understood."[9] Much of that was due to the conversation surrounding the meaning of photography. Most critics were fearful of what photography would mean for traditional art and artists. A few were concerned with how photography would be received in society and how it would change the established culture. Over time, though, "[p]hotography suggested that the world would become more immediate and more legible to more people than in the past."[10]

"Immediate" is the key word as contemporary discussions on the history of photography developed. In *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*,[11] historian Nancy Martha West argues that the rise of amateur and family photography, allowed by the invention of the Kodak Company and camera in the late nineteenth century, created the contemporary way we experience nostalgia. Many historians argue that Kodak's invention made photography more accessible and more democratic. The Kodak camera reduced the exposure time to only a moment, which essentially allowed for snapshot photography to develop, for people to take photographs while they were

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[8] Mary Warner Marien, *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.
[9] Marien, *Photography and Its Critics*, 3.
[10] Ibid., 6.
[11] Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia 2000).

experiencing a moment. The Sackett collection, which is characterized by Vernor's style and practice of taking snapshot photographs, has a legacy in this invention and how it shaped twentieth century culture. Since Kodak began in 1888 and created a handheld camera for the masses, an unthinkable number of photographs of everyday life have been produced. Vernor's collection is one of a countless number of personal photograph collections that probably exist. The development of amateur and family photography because of Kodak's inventions has also created opportunities for new forms of photographic analysis. This analysis focuses on photography as a cultural product rather than as an art form, which separates this history of photography from art history. I will not analyze Vernor's photographs for their legitimacy as art, but for what they might reveal about Vernor's life in Oregon during the early twentieth century, and, perhaps more importantly, try to understand what Vernor wanted to capture, to remember, and to document about his own life. West writes that "Kodak taught amateur photographers to apprehend their experiences and memories as objects of nostalgia, for the easy availability of snapshots allowed people for the first time in history to arrange their lives in such a way that painful or unpleasant aspects were systematically erased."[12]

West is an important historian in this field because she challenges the traditional narratives of analysis. She argues that the history of photography is not just about the photograph, but also about how the photograph was constructed to mean something in our society. The photograph is a permanent record with substantial influence for both the collective and individual culture. West argues that Kodak shaped "the ethos of our culture, an ethos based on the seeming self-contradiction of valuing the present moment and valuing a past that seems fully lost. Kodak taught us to live with such a contradiction by holding it in the single image of a

[12] West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, 1.

snapshot."[13] The Kodak camera allowed the photographer to be present in a moment, while simultaneously capturing it, constructing and preserving a memory as it was being lived. By doing so, the photographer creates an immediate past. In the early 1920s when Vernor took his photographs, this idea of taking these snapshot photographs was still a new development. This is only part of the cultural context that surrounds the Sackett collection, but it is very important to understand the notable style of the photographs as well as why Vernor would collect and keep them the way he did.

Another historian like West who is almost entirely concerned with the cultural context that surrounds photographs and how they are experienced is Martha Sandweiss. In *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*,[14] Sandweiss argues that "ultimately, [photographs] greatest value lies not in the physical information they convey […] but in the ways in which they elicit stories from their viewers."[15] She argues that photographs have multiple meanings, and the meaning they give to the person who encounters the photograph is equally important to the meaning of the actual image. There will undoubtedly be a difference between how I view the images given my historical moment versus the meaning that Vernor assigned to his photographs. Those differences just create opportunities for different narratives to develop. In her book, Sandweiss uses photographs to tell a larger narrative of Western American expansion in the late nineteenth century. Her approach represents an important break in another traditional way that historians used photographs, and further challenges ideas about the culture of photography. In history, photographs are often used as illustrations to a text. Sandweiss diverts from that conventional use in that she uses the photographs as the texts, as her primary source

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[13] Ibid., 18.
[14] Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
[15] Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 343.

documents. The photographs are not illustrations added in to provide a visual representation of a fact, but used as the beginning point of her research. And this is what I intend to do with the Sackett collection.

Sandweiss explores this topic further and with more relevance to digital archive collections in "Image and Artifact: The Photograph as Evidence in the Digital Age."[16] She firstly emphasizes that understanding the meaning of a photograph is difficult without knowing the photographer, "to the extent that every photograph represents a point of view, in the literal as well as the interpretive sense, it is always worth inquiring what it is."[17] She secondly emphasizes that the meaning of the photograph changes over time, and that interpretations of photographs change over time. Sandweiss argues that the interesting and important meaning is extracted when these interpretations are compared and contrasted. This is one intention I have with the Sackett collection, although my research has only led me to speculation about Vernor's intentions for the photographs. Finding meaning in a photograph can be synonymous with constructing a narrative, and that can only be found by engaging not only with the image, but with the photographer, the historical context, and the lens through which the historian is reading the photograph. All of these various meanings are "rarely fixed or self-evident," but it is in discovering these meanings that an interesting, unique narrative develops.[18] Sandweiss' essay is especially relevant to the Sackett collection because it exists both physically and digitally. Like Baylis, Sandweiss is merely skeptical of what only experiencing an image in a digital form could change in the meaning of the photograph. Sandweiss asks how much an historian can trust an image, even more so than they already should be skeptical because it is not a physical object. For Sandweiss,

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[16] Martha Sandweiss, "Image and Artifact: The Photograph as Evidence in the Digital Age," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (June 2007): 193-202.
[17] Sandweiss, "Image and Artifact," 194.
[18] Ibid., 196.

one of the most important elements of archival work for historians is that they experience a physical object, similar to how Robinson and Baylis describe the importance of the archival encounter because "[i]n digital archives we encounter bodies of historical work for which there is no original viewing context."[19] Sandweiss asks how this will shape the memory of events and experiences. With this methodology and with the photographs in a digital context, a more nuanced narrative of photographs can develop.

Using photographs as documents complicates the historical narrative in other ways as well. The historian who approaches the research in this way, as I intend to do, must be equally versed in visual literacy and that form of historical analysis. In "Through a Glass, Darkly: Photography and Cultural Memory,"[20] historian Alan Trachtenberg argues that "[i]mages may be seen as analogous to words but not identical with them; they are a different kind and order of thing from narrative or written description."[21] Images, especially photographs, reveal a different type of history than written documents. A lot of that is because of their nostalgic elements, like West has argued, and because today they are completely integrated into our culture and society. According to Trachtenberg, people experience and understand photographs differently than they do written records because of the conversational nature of photographs. When photographs are analyzed as an object and considered within the frame of cultural experience and cultural memory, they have a conversational relationship with the historian. Trachtenberg argues that, "[i]t is not an identity but a symbiosis that links photography and history: the historian needs the visual record as supplementary date or information; the image needs the historian or historically

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[19] Ibid., 198.
[20] Alan Trachtenberg, "Through a Glass, Darkly: Photography and cultural memory," from *Photographic Theory: An Historical Anthology* ed. Andrew E. Hershberger, (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2014).
[21] Trachtenberg, "Through a Glass, Darkly," 422.

minded viewer to read in its hieroglyphic markings the possibility of meaning."[22] An historical narrative cannot be told through the photographs alone. It requires context, and more importantly, it requires someone, in this case the historian, to construct and synthesize that context: the different interpretations decide what narrative the photograph presents.

This narrative also reveals what memories are being told through the photographs. Trachtenberg finds that photographs create a constructed cultural memory. He argues that "[a]s much an interpretation of the present as the past, and an anticipation of a future, the framing of visual memory can have major consequences on how people identify shared historical culture."[23] Here, Trachtenberg highlights the importance of the photographer and the historian in constructing the experience, the memory, and the history. The photographer chooses what is captured in the frame; the historian chooses how to contextualize that image. And for the historian, choosing what questions to ask of the image is telling of their own cultural moment. The narrative I write with the Sackett photographs and using these contemporary methods of historical analysis will undoubtedly be a product of my academic and cultural moment history, of myriad forces coming together. Trachtenberg argues that "[t]he power of photographs as cultural memory, the memory of events or persons we could not have experienced firsthand except through photographs, derives from ingrained belief that every photograph portrays at least the raw material of memory, shows what memory is."[24] Following this line of scholarship in the history of photography, another way to approach the Sackett photographs would be to argue that the photographs reveal what Vernor thought would be important to remember. That in taking the photographs, Vernor constructed his own future memories, and perhaps more importantly, his own history.

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 423.
[24] Ibid.

Early biographical information on the Sackett family comes from three sources. One is the Sackett Family Association,[25] a website devoted to the history and genealogy of the Sacketts. Another is a biography of Sheldon written in 1970 by Joseph Russell Sand,[26] a Master's thesis at the University of Oregon School of Journalism. The third is a book written about early settlers of Oregon; the pages relating to Fred were provided to me by Elisabeth Walton Potter (a niece of Sheldon).[27] Vernor was born in Jefferson, Oregon in 1898, but both his father, Fred Brown Sackett, and his mother, Hattie Ermina Sackett, were born in New York. Fred attended Syracuse University for at least some time. It is unclear how or when Fred and Hattie met, but in 1887 they got married in New York. Three years later, they moved west to Oregon to begin farming. Vernor's older brother Leland was born in 1890 in Corvallis. After that, the Sacketts kept moving throughout the Willamette Valley while Fred transitioned into "conducting mercantile business."[28] Their younger brother Sheldon was born in 1902, also in Jefferson like Vernor. But by the time Vernor and Sheldon began high school, the Sacketts were firmly planted in Sheridan, a small town about thirty miles west of Salem. Leland, Vernor, and Sheldon were the only children of Fred and Hattie to survive into adulthood. Frank Shenck was actually the first child born to Fred and Hattie in 1888, but he died in 1896. Two children were born after Sheldon but did not survive past infancy: Miriam was born in 1903 and Schuyler Walcott was born in 1905. From 1925 to 1931, Fred was the county judge for Yamhill County. He is also listed as being a member of the Ancient and Accepted Masons, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, and

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[25] Chris Sackett, "The Sackett Family Association," Last updated 30 April 2015, http://sackettfamily.info/.
[26] Joseph Russell Sand, *Sheldon F. Sackett: Flamboyant Oregon Journalist* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon, 1971).
[27] Robert Carlton Clark, *History of the Willamette Valley, Oregon*, Volume III (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1927).
[28] Clark, *History of the Willamette Valley Oregon*, 472.

Woodmen of the World. The Sacketts were also Methodist. Hattie and Fred lived in Sheridan until they died in 1933 and 1940 respectively. It is difficult to distinguish how similar the Sacketts are to other families at the turn of the century. Because Fred was able to attend a university for at least some time, he and Hattie probably came from the upper-middle class. They had enough money to move to Oregon, but based on how much they moved around they maybe struggled for a while. At some point, Fred was able to become involved with the Oregon Republican Party and work his way up to becoming a judge. And with such a large collection of photographs, the Sacketts also had enough money to buy Vernor his cameras.

There are many images of Fred and Hattie in the Sackett collection as well as photographs of Vernor's future in-laws, and the boys often visited their parents in Sheridan while they were in school. While the relationship with their parents is not entirely clear—although it does seem important to the brothers based on the number of photographs that show their family—Sand argues that at least Sheldon and his mother were very close. Sand writes that "[Sheldon] Sackett had a 'great mother fixation,' according to Helen Ten Brook, who said 'he was the youngest and his mother felt he could do no wrong.' This is echoed by Forest Amsden who said, '[Sheldon] Sackett worshipped his mother."[29]

When Fred and Hattie moved to Oregon in 1890, the population of the rural state barely thirty years old was rapidly growing. In 1860, there were a little over 52,000 people in Oregon. By 1900, that number had grown to about 414,000.[30] Even with that rapid growth, Oregon was a conservative, rural state at that time in the early twentieth century. The population was mostly white and Christian, as the Native Americans had been pushed onto reservations by 1850. In

[29] Sand, *Sheldon F. Sackett*, 71-72.
[30] http://www.census.gov/popest/data/state/asrh/2013/index.html

Oregon: This Storied Land,[31] historian William Robbins argues that, as the state grew and urban centers developed such as Portland and Salem, the state's population became more divided along social issues, but overall the state could be characterized by conservative twentieth century values. When Vernor and Sheldon were at Willamette and then recent graduates in the 1920s, "Oregon's social and cultural life reflected [...] fundamentally nativist views, values that fit well with the conventions of largely homogenous society and its tendencies toward social, cultural, and religious conformity."[32] According to Sand—who received most of his information about the Sackett family from interviews with Leland in 1970—"at the beginning of the 20th century, there was nothing unusual about a hardware merchant in Oregon's Willamette Valley being a Republican, especially if he migrated from upper New York State. And, there was nothing unusual for the children of that merchant to become Republicans as they reached manhood."[33] He goes on to say that Sheldon departed from his father's conservative views, eventually becoming fairly liberal. Young people in 1920s America are often characterized by their liberalism. Robbins argues that "many conservative and traditional-minded Oregonians ascribed those disruptions to the growing acceptance of libertarian and licentious behavior, reflected in the growing use of automobiles and the emergence of jazz."[34] With their university education, their cars, and most likely their drinking, teenagers and young adults at this time did live different lives than their parents, but that also does not imply that they were not conservative in many ways.

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[31] William Robbins, *Oregon: This Storied Land* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2005).
[32] Robbins, *Oregon*, 112.
[33] Sand, *Sheldon F. Sackett*, 14.
[34] Robbins, *Oregon*, 112.

Salem, the state's capital and the home of Willamette University, reflected these conservative values. In fact, the city regarded itself as the most American city in the west.[35] In 1910, when the population was just under 20,000, the city of Salem believed it was "a worthy example of the freedom of the West, with its liberal parks, broad streets and rolling green lawns. It breathes the spirit of industrial, enterprising citizenship."[36] The city of Salem was proud of the small town's growth in the twentieth century. The city directory's lauded the physical growth of the city and the growing amount of capital there, writing, "Cement sidewalks are the only kind found in the business districts and there is a movement on foot whereby all the streets are being laid with the best hard surface pavement throughout the business and residence sections."[37] According to the 1911 directory, "during the past three years Salem's combined bank deposits have increased $587,429.06 annually, which gives some idea of the prosperity prevalent here."[38] While there was substantial growth in businesses within the city, the biggest sector of the economy in Salem at the time was still agriculture, and specifically in hops.

The city was proud of its university, too. According to the directory, "From her [Willamette] halls have come many a leader of this state in professional and scholastic avenues."[39] In 1919, when Vernor and Sheldon were both attending Willamette, the university was only a few decades old and in the middle of Carl Doney's tenure as president of Willamette. The school was still small; each class had fewer than 100 people. Willamette students received a secular education rooted in the liberal arts and sciences. By the time Vernor and Sheldon

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[35] *Polks's Salem City and Marion County Directory*, 16th ed. (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1926-1927), 10.
[36] *Polks's Salem City and Marion County Directory*, 8th ed. (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1909-1910), 9.
[37] Ibid., 10-11.
[38] *Polks's Salem City and Marion County Directory*, 9th ed. (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1911), 18.
[39] *Polks's Salem City and Marion County Directory*, 8th ed. (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1909-1910), 11.

graduated in 1922, Salem's population was estimated to be around 35,000 people. In the 1921 city directory, the year that the majority of the photographs appear to be taken, the brothers are listed as students at Willamette and living outside the campus at 920 Oak Street.[40]

Vernor was the staff photographer for the *Wallulah*, the student yearbook, for the 1920-1921 academic year, and many images in the collection match photographs in the *Wallulah*. So for many of these images, Vernor's intention was to have them published in the *Wallulah*. But the others, and what seems like the majority, in the collection were just for him. Photography was probably just a hobby for Vernor, which is unfortunate, because many of his photographs are phenomenal, and what I argue are of professional quality. Vernor's peers saw that skill in him, too. Next to Vernor's junior year photo in the *Wallulah* is the caption: "'Big Chub' is a good reliable personage, and has more talents than he cares to develop. He owns a whole flock of cameras that won't eat anything but embarrassing situations. Sings a deep 'sonorous' bass, sells pictures, trades kodaks, and goes to school in his spare time."[41]

I originally thought that in following the contemporary scholarship on the history of photography—using the photographs as objects and as the primary sources in this research—I should begin the narrative with the first images in the collection. Following that, the first images up for interpretation would be the photographs of the Willamette "football men" that Vernor took for the *Wallulah*. But because not all of the images were explicitly dated, the negatives were numbered in the original order in which they appeared, meaning that they appear as the organizers of the collection (the other student intern and I) encountered the negatives, which does not necessarily reflect a chronological order. While the "football men" are the first images in the collection, they are most likely not the first photos that Vernor took that appear in the

[40] *Polks's Salem City and Marion County Directory*, 13th ed. (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1921), 182.
[41] *The Wallulah* (Salem, OR: Associated Students of Willamette University), 77.

collection. Based on my research, I argue that Vernor's war photographs are most likely the first photographs he took in the collection, and maybe even the first he ever took.

Vernor stands on the shore of the Rhine, a river on the western side of Germany. Through the viewfinder of his camera, he can see a boat docked.[42] It is close enough that the word "Andernach" is visible on the port side of the boat. It is the name of a town, probably where Vernor is in this moment. There are men, some in uniform, walking on and off the boat. They look like they are loading a truck onto it. Across the river, buildings and smokestacks line the sky. It is sometime between 1917 and 1919. Vernor is less than twenty years old, a fresh recruit of the United States Army, called out of his high school in Sheridan, Oregon to bring an end to the Great War that had been ravaging Europe for three years.

Vernor was in high school when the United States entered the war. He enlisted along with many of his classmates in April of 1917. The *Oregonian* reported that "Before another month has passed Sheridan will have sent more than 50 boys to the ranks of the Army and Navy. It seems quite possible that the total number will exceed 60...the schools are almost denuded of boys."[43] Vernor's younger brother Sheldon, at only fifteen years old in 1917, was not old enough to enlist in the war. Leland, though, who was five years older than his brother Vernor, did register. According to his draft card dated May 23, 1917, Leland was twenty-four years old and unmarried at the time, living in Portland and working for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Robbins argues that "the First World War marked a watershed of sorts in Oregon and Northwest history. When the United States joined the hostilities in Europe, thousands of young men from the region

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[42] VMS_567A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.

[43] "Recruits Empty School," *The Oregonian*. Morning Edition. Portland, Oregon. April 7, 1917: 15. America's Historical Newspapers.

voluntarily enlisted in the military."[44] While many volunteered for the war in the first months of the United States' involvement, President Woodrow Wilson did have to issue a draft, and because of his age, Leland was required to register. But Vernor did not meet the age requirement for mandatory registration, which means that he volunteered to serve on his own. In *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture 1875-1945*[45] historian Jon Savage argues that "war was not universally popular among American youth, but most stayed in step. They were assisted in their decision by a relentless barrage of propaganda."[46] All of Vernor's photographs are labeled with cities or regions along the Rhine, so we assume that he was in Germany during the war, or immediately following the end of it. An important fact to note though is that no Americans actually fought in Germany; they were in France. But all of Vernor's photographs in that section are captioned with cities in Germany, so he may have been part of the disarmament that took place there in 1918 and 1919 after the war ended in November.

Before the First World War, photography had developed into not just a popular hobby, but also a driver of the growing tourism industry. If the men featured in Vernor's photographs were not in uniform, the set of images from the collection could be mistaken for a young man's trip through Europe. Historians Andrew L. Mendelson and Carolyn Kitch in "Creating a Photographic Record of World War I: 'Real History' and Recuperative Memory in Stereography,"[47] explain that while there are a significant number of what are classified by art historians as "war photographs" from the era, there are very few images of violence or conflict in the fields of battle because of formal censorship guidelines that both governments and journalists

[44] Robbins, *Oregon*, 107.
[45] Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture 1875-1945* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
[46] Savage, *Teenage*, 175.
[47] Andrew L. Mendelson and Carolyn Kitch, "Creating a Photographic Record of World War I: 'Real History' and Recuperative Memory in Stereography," *Journalism History* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 142-150.

put in place and followed.[48] Vernor, perhaps because of the rules or because of ideas about patriotism, did not appear to take any photographs of the battles he may or may not have fought in during the war. The images, instead, are of soldiers walking through towns[49] and posing for photographs with German citizens.[50] Other photographs in the set depict the soldiers eating[51] or writing letters home[52] or reading newspapers.[53] In one image, the soldiers are playing baseball in a field behind some houses.[54] In another, they pose with movie equipment next to signs that read "Y.M.C.A. Movies To Night."[55] Based on these photographs, you would not know if these men fought in battles or suffered from the traumatizing "shell shock" that is a common narrative of the First World War. Almost five million men from the United States served in the Army, Navy and Marines. Over 200,000 suffered non-fatal wounds, but almost 120,000 died from battles or from other causes during the war.[56] The United States' loss, while significant, is only a small contribution to the over sixteen million soldier and civilians from around the world who died during the war. Both Vernor and Leland survived.

Many of Vernor's photographs from Europe reveal a strong sense of othering and patriotism, perhaps a reflection of the growing nationalism in the twentieth century. This notion

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[48] Mendelson and Kitch, "Creating a photographic record of World War I," 144.
[49] VMS_631A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[50] VMS_598A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[51] VMS_727A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[52] VMS_735A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[53] VMS_742A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[54] VMS_729A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[55] VMS_750A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[56] Nese F. DeBruyne and Anne Leland, "American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics," Congressional Research Service, January 2, 2015: 2.

of using photography to separate oneself from the place or the people where the photographs are being taken has a long history in war photography. Mendelson and Kitch argue that photographs during World War I were "integral to the Allied governments' successful strategies to emphasize their successes and portray the Germans as barbaric." Vernor's photographs from the war seem to support this narrative, even if he did not have that intention. Every picture of a soldier portrays him in a relaxed, almost playful pose, never in combat or indicative of a sense of urgency or stress. The soldiers are also viewed with German citizens, but only women and children, and the subjects look purposefully posed. In one, a young girl sits on an American soldier's lap.[57] In his own captions, Vernor would sometimes label the soldiers with names, but never the women or children he photographed. It could have been that by the time he returned to the United States he had forgotten their names. It could also be that he did not feel the need to name them. The soldiers, and Vernor, look proud of themselves. In one set of images, Vernor and a few other soldiers are on a boat, floating down the Rhine. They take turns snapping photographs of each other, posing in their uniforms, looking out at the towns on the shore as they pass by. In the last image in the set,[58] two soldiers sit on a bench to the right side of the frame. One stares out at something on the shore, another looks toward the camera. An American flag flies low on a pole in the center of the image. Vernor focuses the camera on only the flag, and takes the picture.

While Vernor was in Europe, his younger brother Sheldon was only sixteen years old and beginning his freshman year at Willamette. In the October 3, 1918 issue of the *Collegian* the paper reported that in that first publication of the semester that "the absence of familiar faces is especially noticeable to the upperclassmen. This is attributed to the fact that few men students

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[57] VMS_599A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[58] VMS_625A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.

beyond the age of twenty-one have returned [...] The ever increasing number of stars on the service flags give reliable testimony as to the whereabouts of many of our former students."[59] Only a little over a month later on November 11 the First World War would be called to an end, and most of those faces would return to the small college in Salem, Oregon. Vernor would return from his service in Europe the next year and join his brother as a sophomore. They were members of the Class of 1922, which was "the largest freshman class in the history of the institution" at that time.[60] Sixty-eight men and sixty-six women began their classes at Willamette in the fall of 1918, and according to the *Collegian* "at no time since our entrance into the war has the registration of girls and boys been so nearly balanced."[61]

Vernor and Sheldon attended Willamette while there was a shift in the structure and culture of the university. These transformations in the early 1920s are attributed to not only the changing nature of higher education in the United States at the time, but also to Carl Doney, who was Willamette's president from 1915 to 1934.[62] At this time, Willamette still had the Kimball School of Theology, a remnant of its roots as a Methodist institution. Students of Willamette then were just as heavily involved in the campus, often members of several clubs and societies at a time. All three Sackett brothers were involved in the university's student publications for at least some time. Vernor was especially important to the *Wallulah*. He probably spent the majority of his junior year, the year he was listed as the official staff photographer of the yearbook, running around campus with his cameras, documenting student life at Willamette. As previously mentioned, many photographs in the collection, probably about 100, match

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[59] "Class of 1922 Is Largest In W.U. History," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. October 3, 1918: 1. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Wright Cowger, *The first hundred years, 1834-1934: Willamette University from Jason Lee to Carl Doney* (Salem, Or.: Willamette University, 1981), 21.

photographs in the 1920-1921 *Wallulah*. The first images of Willamette, in fact the first photographs that appear in the collection (again not necessarily reflective of chronology), are of the football team.

The images of the football team are one of the cases in the Sackett Collection in which Vernor captioned his negatives. The very first photograph that appears in the collection Vernor captioned "Football Men 1920 "Jit" Nickel."[63] The "football man" is Jacob Nickel, also a member of the class of 1922. He is in a football position, crouching on the ground with one hand down, the other behind his back. He is on his toes, looking not at the camera, but somewhere just above it. In 1920, the football helmet is less of a helmet and more of a cloth cap that is loosely secured to the player's head. There are seventeen images of these 1920 "football men." Photographs of other teams, clubs, and what look like casts of plays appear in the collection.[64] But Vernor, with his eye for photography, advocated for not only these posed photographs to appear in the *Collegian*, but also for snapshot photographs to be published. In 1921, Vernor suggested that there should be more snapshot photographs in the *Wallulah*: "Paul Flegel eating noodles or Dean Richards going to the Bligh, were suggested as suitable subjects for pictures when Vernor Sackett made an appeal for snapshots for the *Wallulah* last Wednesday morning chapel period. This was the call for feature fodder which comes from the *Wallulah* each spring, and which sets each students on edge to 'get something' on his neighbor."[65]

Vernor's style of snapshot photography is immediately evident and is the main stylistic characteristic in the collection. He was not a pioneer of this photography movement, but he may

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[63] VMS_001A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[64] VMS_560A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[65] "More Camera Activities Instigated by Wallulah," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, Oregon. January 19, 1921: 1. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.

have been an early adopter of it. One reason why the Sackett negatives are important is because of this style. If Vernor took classically posed photographs, we wouldn't have these intimate images of everyday life for these university students in the 1920s. Because we have these images, we can see what young adult life was like. One of the most interesting aspects I have found in the pictures are of Vernor and Sheldon's fraternity, Sigma Tau.

Fraternities were increasingly growing in popularity at this time at Willamette and throughout other colleges and universities, and a young person's social status was tied to them. In *A History of American Higher Education*,[66] historian John Thelin argues that "one legacy of the 'golden age of college life that diffused into the 1920s and 1930s was a tendency for students at all the campuses to be split into haves and have-not—usually along the lines of the Greek-letter system of fraternities and sororities versus the ranks of the 'Independents.' Power and prestige went disproportionately to the self-perpetuating social organizations."[67] While Sigma Tau does not appear to be the only source of social life for the brothers, the fraternity does seem to be an important part of their time at Willamette. Their male friends who are most often photographed were also part of Sigma Tau; the women they dated and eventually married were members of a sorority, Delta Phi. The Greek organizations were formed mainly as living and social communities, particularly for students whose families didn't live in Salem. Students who lived in Salem with their families often didn't join fraternities or sororities.

One of the most important social events for Willamette students at this time was the annual picnic at Silver Creek Falls hosted by Sigma Tau. Based on the photographs, Vernor and his friends spent a lot of time in that area, which had not yet been established as a state park.

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[66] John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
[67] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 219.

Some of the images from that picnic are portraits of Mary Notson,[68] Vernor's future wife. Others are of the trucks, piled with people, driving down rocky and unpaved roads out of the city and into the forest.[69] On June 1, 1921, the *Collegian* reported: "Sigma Taus were the hosts; Silver Creek Falls was the place, which is enough to indicate that the fraternity picnic of May 21 was a surpassing event […] And, as they ate oranges and marshmallows beneath the wishing star, what could have been their desire but another picnic."[70]

While the images from the picnic are fun and innocent, there was also a darker side to these fraternities, and like the picnics, it was also well documented by Vernor. Today, these images are shocking and very unsettling. But at Willamette at this time, these violent images were so normal that they were published in the *Wallulah*. One of the images from the new collection of photographs, which has not been published online, shows a group of men, including Sheldon, surrounding a man on his hands and knees with few clothes. They all are holding paddles, and the man is blindfolded. Sheldon appears in this image, and because Vernor most likely took the photograph, we assume that they are members of Sigma Tau hazing a new initiate. Both Sheldon and Vernor were members of Sigma Tau, so I am assuming that the image is a record of some sort of hazing ritual. There is another, almost equally disturbing image, of men dressed in what look like prison uniforms. They are standing in a line, tied together by rope and blindfolded. There are at least four men dressed in black coats. This looks like another sort of hazing ritual, most likely also from the same fraternity. Vernor appears to have put the same care into framing these images as he does all the others in the collection.

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[68] VMS_106A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[69] VMS_093, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[70] "Society," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. June 1, 1921: 3. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.

While the presence of the photographs can lead to the assumption that this was a widely-practiced and accepted activity within the fraternities at Willamette, the university was monitoring hazing and actively speaking against it as early as 1882, when in response to a students at Cornell being expelled for hazing, the *Collegian* wrote, "After several years of rather careful observation of student life, the conclusion has been forced upon us that college regulations, like our common laws, have not, in many cases, been as strictly enforced as they should have been." The paragraph concluded, "But there seems to be a growing demand that college regulations, as well as criminal laws, shall be more strictly enforced, and that the simple fact of one's being a student does not excuse him from being a gentleman at all times and in all places."[71] A similar sentiment was portrayed in the *Collegian* in 1916 in the spring before Sheldon and Vernor were at Willamette. The author condemned the "rah-rah spirit" of youth, writing, "Ordinarily it keeps within the law of its own volition, and generally it means much more than the mere thought of athletics. When it goes to the point of hazing, those forwarding it should be punished as any other criminals."[72] But in 1919, Willamette's complicated relationship with hazing was seen again. Another article in the *Collegian* described the rules that were placed on freshman by the upperclassmen, who allegedly held a meeting to decide what rules to place on the freshman. The *Collegian* wrote that "The regulations in regard to hazing are that no hazing shall take place on Wednesday nights and that all unnecessary hazing will meet with the disapproval of all upperclassmen. The interpretation in this regard is that all hazing except that necessary to enforce regulations will be discouraged."[73]

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[71] *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. February 1, 1882: 6. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[72] "The Rah Rah Boy." *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. February 1, 1882: 6. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[73] "Freshmen Caps Make Debut On Campus Monday." *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. February 5, 1919: 1. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.

These images are similar to many more in the collection that reflect the Sackett brothers' developing masculinity. In *Manliness & Civilizations: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*[74] historian Gail Bederman argues that this was a common mindset during the era. In the first half of the twentieth century "[t]he consumer culture's ethos of pleasure and frivolity clashed with ideals of manly self-restraint, further undermining the potency of middle-class manliness. Economically based changes in middle-class culture were thus eroding the sense of manliness which remained so essential to nineteenth-century men's identity."[75] The images that most reflect "manliness" or struggles to prove masculinity are not seen until the photographs that most likely date after Vernor's time serving in the war, perhaps in an effort to preserve some sort of feeling that he had while serving. Besides the images of football, the other images that portray themes of masculinity most often include images of the men dressing up in blackface and acting out prejudiced ideas of African Americans and Native Americans. Bederman argues that this is a reflection of the turn of the century, when "Americans were obsessed with the connection between manhood and racial dominance. This obsession was expressed in a profusion in issues, from debates over lynching, to concern about the white man's imperialistic burden overseas, to discussions of child-rearing...multitude of ways middle-class Americans found to explain male supremacy in terms of white racial dominance and, conversely, to explain white supremacy in terms of male power."[76] While Vernor and Sheldon may not have been consciously perpetuating these ideas, the photographs suggest that the brothers did participate in this historical narrative.

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[74] Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[75] Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 13.
[76] Ibid., 4.

These issues about masculinity and racial dominance are also seen in other aspects of the Sackett brothers' lives. Robbins argues that issues over race were common in Oregon at this time because Oregon was "largely homogeneous society" with "tendencies toward social, cultural, and religious conformity."[77] Salem, too, appeared to be proud of its homogeneity. In the city directory of 1926-1927, Salem described itself as "Known was the most all-American city in the West,"[78] and that "There is absolutely no foreign element in Salem."[79] Other elements of Oregon's culturally nativist opinions can be seen in the extra-curricular activities of the Sacketts. In 1921, the *Collegian* reported that (at the same meeting in which Leland became the vice president of the club) the Websterian society held a debate about the exclusion of emigrants from America for ten years, and the debate was resolved in the affirmative.[80] While Sheldon was at Willamette, he was also a member of the debate team. The *Collegian* reported that Sheldon debated about "attitudes of the people of the United States toward the Japanese."[81] While the *Collegian* is not a definitive source for attitudes about race at Willamette, it does offer insight into the conversations around it. This research, along with the photographs, indicates that if anything, Willamette students were talking about race, at a time when the university professors and the student body were almost completely white. These images of men in masculine situations, going out into the nature of Oregon demonstrate Bederman's argument that "the sons of the middle class faced the real possibility that traditional sources of male power and status would remain closed to them forever—that they would become failures instead of self-made

[77] Robbins, *This Storied Land*, 112.
[78] *Polk's Salem City and Marion County Directory* Volume 15 (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1926-1927), 13.
[79] *Polk's Salem City and Marion County Directory* Volume 15 (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1926-1927), 13.
[80] "Websterians Elect," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. February 18, 1914: 3. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[81] "Debate season open March 12," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. March 2, 1921: 1. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.

men."[82] Looking ahead into their lives, Sheldon embodies this narrative more than both Leland and Vernor.

The Sackett collection holds another set of photographs that highlight another important aspect of the culture of the twentieth century: dating. Both Vernor and Sheldon were engaged by the time they left Willamette. Their engagements were announced at an event held at the Delta Phi sorority house where both their future wives were members. The announcement, published in the *Collegian*: "Double announcement of the engagement of Miss Mary Notson to Vernor Sackett and Miss Sadie Pratt to Sheldon Sackett, was made at the dinner-hour of Friday at the Delta Phi house [...] The many friends of the popular young people extend their congratulations and lavish wishes for the future."[83] Vernor and Sheldon were very much involved in the dating scene at Willamette before they settled on the women who they asked to marry them. There are pictures of other women in what seems like dating situations and with women who are not Mary Notson or Sadie Pratt. In *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America*,[84] historian Beth Bailey argues that dating in this era was not only about finding companionship, but also about women developing their own value and self-worth through the dating process. She writes that "in quite literal terms, women gauged their own value in dating by how much money men spent on them [...] In this system, that men pay for the date was crucial. Beyond that, the more he spent—publicly—the better. By rating visibly expensive dates—orchids, good seats at the theater, dinners at elegant restaurants—women publicly demonstrated how much they were worth in the dating game."[85] And Vernor and Sheldon did

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[82] Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 12.
[83] *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. June 7, 1922: 3. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[84] Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
[85] Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 65.

appear to spend, if not a lot of money (although the Sacketts appear to be comfortably situated in the upper-middle class), a lot of time on these dates. In one set of photos, Vernor and Mary go on some sort of adventure on canoes.

The 1920s youth culture that developed, and is often analyzed, at this time was in part possible because of the amount of freedom of mobility that men and women had. This was especially true in the case of university and college students, who at this time were more and more likely to have traveled significantly to attend school. In the case of the Sackett brothers, their family lived in Sheridan, a small town that is thirty miles away from Salem. The brothers were close enough to see their family, as they sometimes did according to the society pages of the *Collegian*, and to do that they most likely had a car. In the time frame of the collection, at least Vernor traveled to the Wallowa Mountains, the Redwood forest, Yosemite National Park, and even New Orleans, along with many trips to Portland and Silver Creek Falls. While the brothers obviously valued their family, they also enjoyed the freedom that a developing adolescent culture offered.

Part of that freedom in youth culture was drinking, which appeared to be a strong part of the lives of the Sackett brothers. Prohibition in the United States was officially enacted with the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920, in the middle of Sheldon's sophomore year, and it was officially ended by the Twenty-First amendment in 1933. In the Sackett collection, some of the most intriguing photos, which date to almost exactly this time, are of distilleries and bars.[86] In one set of images, a makeshift distillery is tucked among trees in a forest. In *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*,[87] historian Paula Fass argues that "prohibition cut

[86] VMS_325A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.
[87] Paula Fass, *The damned and the beautiful: American youth in the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

off a former freedom" for young adults, although that didn't necessarily stop them from drinking.[88] With the Sackett brothers, there are many photographs of students obviously drinking. Fass writes that even with prohibition, only thirty-four percent of students reported that they didn't drink.[89] Fass also connects prohibition and gender. She argues that "unlike the other moral issues of the twenties, drinking was a male-centered problem that secondarily involved women […] Drinking among youths during the twenties therefore involved a number of distinct social issues: the attitude toward the moral code, the attitude toward the law, and the question of female roles."[90] Vernor and Sheldon appear to be within the majority of their peers. The pictures that Vernor took of the forest distillery are particularly interesting because of one image in the set, in which three men appear to be standing in front of the distillery.[91] Vernor labeled the photograph "Sheriff Manning with Deputies McQueen and" the other name was illegible. It's unclear if the sheriff is part of the distillery or perhaps shutting it down. It is unclear why Vernor would be there taking these photos in the first place. Since it is not dated, the set of images is just one more mystery in the collection.

That is just one mystery in a collection that started out, and generally still continues to be, full of them. One of the reasons why I was so curious about the collection was because the photographs were too good to have been Vernor's only ones. My assumptions were confirmed in February of this year. While doing this research, I was still working in the archives. One day this semester, I was assigned to scan some glass plate negatives that were labeled "WU Student Life Glass Negatives." Mary McRobinson, the archives director, said that Professor Bruce McIntosh of Willamette bought them from an antique store on the coast. Two of the images are of the

[88] Fass, *The damned and the beautiful*, 310.
[89] Ibid., 311.
[90] Fass, *The damned and the beautiful*, 310.
[91] VMS_208A, The Vernor Martin Sackett Negatives, Archives and Special Collections, Mark O. Hatfield Library, Willamette University.

Kimball School of Theology and Eaton and Waller Halls, which he must have recognized. While editing the digital scans of the glass slides, I immediately recognized a face from the Sackett collection. At first, I was just excited that I could date the images. Then I started looking more closely, and I found Vernor's wife Mary, then more faces I recognized, and then, finally, Sheldon. Vernor does not appear in any of the images, which means that he was probably taking them. After realizing that, Vernor's style is completely evident. Mary McRobinson confirmed that these are probably Vernor's photos. These slides, I would find out, are actually not undiscovered Sackett images. All eighteen of them were in the 1921-1922 *Wallulah*. But, it was still an incredible, fortuitous moment for my research. It shows that there are more Sackett photographs than what we have in the archives, and that maybe Vernor did not stop taking photographs after Willamette. We do assume, though, that the last images that appear chronologically in the collection are dated to about 1930. It is interesting, too, that the years after 1930 are the years in which we know the most about Leland and Sheldon's lives.

There were very few pictures of or relating to Leland in the collection. Unfortunately, that made it so that until this semester, I thought Leland was an uncle or cousin of Vernor's, not his brother. As previously mentioned, Leland attended Willamette at least for some time. While he never graduated, he seemed to have had a substantial effect on Willamette during his time. In the *Collegian*, Leland wrote a letter to the editor advocating for a student government, which had not been officially established at Willamette yet. He wrote, "Student control does not mean the complete turning over of the University into the hands of the undergraduates. It simply means the placing of responsibility where, in the case of mature young people, it should properly belong, and where we, as students, can have greater opportunity of developing and advancing our discretionary powers, of which we shall all have so much need when we bid adieu to our alma

mater."[92] By the next year, an early version of the Associated Students of Willamette University was established, and Leland was on the executive committee. Leland was also the manager of the track and basketball teams, vice president of the Websterian society, and associate editor of athletics for the *Collegian*. He was very active in the social circles based on the Society pages of the *Collegians*, but I've found no explanation for his sudden departure. It was not because of the war, because his draft card reported that he was working for the Southern Pacific Railroad at the time he registered. The closest reference I have found is a note in the society pages of an issue of the 1917 *Collegian*: "Mr. Leland Sackett, ex'15, and Harold Nichols were guests at Lausanne for dinner Saturday."[93]

While Leland never finished his degree at Willamette, his wife Fannie McKennon did. In 1951 she wrote a letter to the editor of the *Collegian*: "To the Editor: Tucked away in an article in a recent *Collegian* I was amazed to read these words, "The building which was founded—in the days when Willamette 'ladies and gentlemen' did nothing but breathe and very little of that—" Having belonged to that ancient era I feel that I've a right to register a mild protest that such a mistaken idea should exist. Willamette students were always a gay, resourceful and busy lot. Even in those days, professors complained that there were far too many extra-curricular activities. There probably was a greater variety of entertainment than there is now. All knew, before registering, of the few restrictions and most were willing to abide by them...Laugh at us if you will, but don't feel sorry for us. We had a wonderful time!"[94] Leland and Fannie had three children, Betty, Stanley, and Russell, and they all lived in Sheridan where Leland owned an

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[92] "People's Editorials," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, Oregon. December 2, 1914: 2. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[93] "Society," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, Oregon. November 21, 1917: 2. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[94] *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, OR. February 23, 1951: 2. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.

insurance company with his brother-in-law. Betty graduated from Willamette in 1944. She was a member of the basketball team and was president of Delta Phi. Leland died in March of 1985 at ninety-two years old in Sheridan. He is said to have had dementia and Alzheimers. One of his children and many of his grandchildren are still alive and living in the Pacific Northwest.

In contrast to Leland, there is much more information about Sheldon. Like his eldest brother before him, Sheldon was really active and present during his years at Willamette. Beginning as a mail clerk for the *Collegian*, Sheldon worked his way up to become the assistant manager of the *Collegian* as a junior and the editor of the paper as a senior. Sheldon is described as brilliant. In a 1970 interview, "When in high school, Leland Sackett, says, 'The teachers never had enough to keep him [Sheldon] busy.'"[95] While at Willamette, according to the *Collegian*, "[Sheldon] Sackett, aside from being among the first five of the institution, was at the time these grades were being earned, editor of the *Collegian*, member of the varsity debating squad, and was out for interclass baseball."[96] Apart from the *Collegian*, Sheldon was president of his class as a junior and played basketball and baseball.[97] He, as well as Vernor, was a member of Sigma Tau. Sheldon was also a successful member of the debate team, competing most often with Robert Notson, whose sister Mary would go on to marry Vernor.

I have speculated a lot about Sheldon's character, because he is a good one, and I think, an interesting foil to Vernor. Sheldon was too young to go to war with Vernor and Leland, so he stayed home while his two brothers went off to war, and at least one of them to Europe. According to many different sources, Sheldon was an extraordinarily driven man. When he was only eight years old he started his own newspaper for his neighborhood. In grade school,

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[95] Sand, "Sheldon Sackett," 15.
[96] "Average student grade 79.9; Seniors high among classes," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, Oregon. May 5, 1922: 1. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.
[97] Sand, *Sheldon F. Sackett*, 18.

Sheldon was one of those students who the teachers could not keep busy enough. He graduated from Willamette at only nineteen years old. Sand's biography of Sheldon describes stories from Sheldon's post-Willamette life and has interviews with people who knew Sheldon at that time, many of whom make the claim that Sheldon was bipolar. There was not much information about his character while he was at Willamette, but there is one instance I found in the *Collegian* that may give some insight into Sheldon's character. At the end of March in 1921, Sheldon participated in the Morningside debate, and afterwards there was a party. In the "Additional Society" section, the *Collegian* reported that Sheldon was one of the students and professors in attendance who helped entertain during the evening with short talks, and "Altho Mr. Sackett continued to debate thruout the festivities, this did not in any way hamper the good feelings cemented by this party."[98]

He studied education at Willamette, and for a short time he was a teacher. At only twenty-one years old, he became a principal in Raymond, Washington. But after that Sheldon's intelligence and motivation and passion for politics and journalism drove a career that made the man an infamous, but now perhaps forgotten, character in Oregon's history. His marriage to his Willamette girlfriend Sadie ended in June 1930, when Sadie filed for divorce after five years of marriage to Sheldon and one child between them. She married Clarence Gillette, or Jete or Jeeter, who was a close friend of Sheldon and Vernor. Jeeter, or Jete, as he is known in the Sackett Collection, was also in Sigma Tau with the brothers. After the divorce from Sadie, Sheldon moved to Salem and married Beatrice Marguerite Walton on December 31, 1931. "[Beatrice] had been an active woman as executive secretary to four governors of Oregon—Patterson, Norblad, Meier, and Martin. After her first child, Marcia, was born, she retired from

[98] "Additional Society," *Willamette Collegian*. Salem, Oregon. April 13, 1921: 4. Mark O. Hatfield Library Archives, Special Collections.

full time employment but was named to the State Board of Higher Education...A dormitory at Oregon State University, Walton Hall, was named for Mrs. Sackett."[99] Beatrice, like Hattie, seemed to be one of the most important women in Sheldon's life. Sand argues that "Beatrice Walton's death came after a long battle with cancer and when she died, perhaps something of [Sheldon] Sackett died, too."[100] Sheldon and Beatrice had two children together. Marcia was born in 1934 and John Walton was born in 1937. Unfortunately, Sheldon's bipolar disorder was passed to his children and grandchildren according to Christopher Kimball, who is Marcia's son. He never knew his father (the name on Kimball's birth certificate was made up by Marcia). He said he once found out his father's real name once, but forgot it. Kimball said that Marcia and John (who they called Skip) also had bipolar disorder. When Kimball was fifteen years old, Marcia committed suicide. David Sackett, Sheldon's son with Sadie Pratt, became Chris's legal guardian. At some point, Kimball found out that Sheldon had actually had another son though his marriage with a woman named Elizabeth Worthington that lasted barely a year. But Schuyler was born in that time, and Chris and Schuyler were very close for a long time. Sheldon's divorce with Elizabeth was filled tension and drama. Sheldon published a lot of the intimate proceedings of the trial in one of his newspapers. That marriage and divorce was Sheldon's fourth and last. His third marriage to a woman named Evelyn Schwabe also lasted only a year.

After Beatrice's death and in between his two subsequent marraiges and divorces, Sheldon struggled to continue to expand the newspaper empire he wanted. When he died in 1968, he owned "the Coos Bay World; Magic Valley Cablevision in Twin Falls, Idaho; The World of Sonoma County, a weekly newspaper in Santa Rosa, California" and the newspaper

[99] Sand, *Sheldon F. Sackett*, 71.
[100] Ibid.

publishing company World Newspapers Inc., based in San Francisco.[101] In 1959 (during the divorce from Elizabeth), Sheldon reported that the total net worth of his assets amounted to $3,567,180.67.[102] Adjusting for inflation today, that would amount to almost $30 million.[103] Sand writes, "Johnson felt Beatrice Walton was a large influence on [Sheldon] Sackett. He said 'If Beatrice Walton had lived, things might have turned out differently. He might have gotten his World [Joseph Pulitzer's conglomeration of newspapers that Sheldon modeled his empire after]. She may have been the only person in the world who could have influenced him. She was the only woman who really understood him. She really did.'"[104] Sheldon is described as erratic, arrogant, manic, and suffered from very extreme mood swings. A former governor of Oregon Charles Sprague "felt [Sheldon] Sackett's career was 'brilliant though erratic' and said '[Sheldon] Sackett's brilliance bordered on genius.'"[105] One of Sheldon's partners "Amsend remembers these years [the years after Beatrice's death] as trying ones. While saying he is not a psychologist, he adds, '[Sheldon] Sackett was widely regarded to be a manic-depressive, and these curves were extreme and violent. About every eighteen months he would leave hands off the paper, almost entirely, for a period of a year or eighteen months, then would do one of those high cycles.'"[106]

During those high cycles, Sheldon was prolific. He would be closely involved with his paper, producing hundreds of editorials. His writing was mainly political, focused on national politics. In his biography, Sand centers on his editorials endorsing presidential candidates, and advocating for newspaper to be employee-owned, supportive of the labor movement but not tied

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[101] Ibid., 7.
[102] Ibid., 8.
[103] www.usinflationcalculator.com. Total calculated to $28,773,050.90.
[104] Sand, *Sheldon F. Sackett*, 71.
[105] Ibid., 4.
[106] Ibid., 90.

to it. Sand argues that "it was not commonplace for the child of a strong Republican to become one of the more liberal Democratic voices in Oregon, but it happened with Sheldon F. Sackett."[107] While Sheldon may not be as well remembered today as he was in 1970 when Sand wrote the biography, Sand argues that "Sackett was the editorial voice of political liberalism in Oregon. He ran, during his time, the only fully Democratic slanted editorial page in the state. His son, John Walton Sackett, noted that when his father was actively supporting Democrats and Socialist programs, Oregon was a more conservative state than it is in 1970, and thus Sackett's support of such programs took more courage than similar support today."[108] Sand remains neutral in his characterization of Sheldon, relying on his sources to speak well or ill of Sheldon. Sand writes, "Those that were close to him [Sheldon] looked toward his kind and generous side, but those not close saw him only during his self-centered state and judged him less generously."[109]

On September 1, 1968, Sheldon died of pancreatic cancer. He was only sixty-six years old. Leland visited Sheldon in the hospital in August for Sheldon's last birthday. And Elizabeth Worthington, who had married Sheldon in January of 1950, gave birth to their son Schuyler in 1951, and then filed for divorce, was there with him until he died.[110] Sand writes, "After Sackett's death, his sons took over the Coos Bay *World*. It is still operating successfully but it, like Pulitzer's *World*, lacks some of the magnetic drive and personality Sheldon Sackett provided. While he can be compared to Pulitzer, [Sheldon] Sackett was, of course, no Pulitzer, although he dreamed of becoming one. What he was was an important Oregon journalist, and

[107] Ibid., 14.
[108] Ibid., 108.
[109] Ibid., 113.
[110] Ibid., 99.

when he died he was eulogized by other newspapermen, politicians, business acquaintances and friends."[111]

Vernor is only mentioned once in Sand's biography of Sheldon. To my knowledge so far, no one who Sand interviewed knew anything about Vernor's photographs. In stark contrast to his two brothers, Vernor, the middle child, seemed to prefer to stay behind the camera while he was at Willamette. Like Sheldon and Leland, Vernor was a member of the Websterian society. He was also part of Sigma Tau with Sheldon. On his own, he was a part of the Glee Club. But other than that, he seems relatively quiet compared to his brothers. Based on the hundreds of photographs, he was social, he had friends. But he was more often than not taking the pictures.

Vernor and Mary Notson were engaged by graduation in 1922 along with Sheldon and Sadie. But Vernor and Mary did not get married until 1930. According to the Salem city directories, Vernor and Mary left Salem for some time. Mary's family lived in Heppner, a very small city near Pendleton, so they might have gone there. And Vernor's family still lived in Sheridan, so the young couple could have lived there as well. By 1934, though, Mary and Vernor had settled in Salem at 1510 Winter Street SE, where they lived out their lives.[112] Their house is still there today. At that time, Vernor was listed as "purch agt Civil Works Administration." Vernor was also listed in the directories as being an insurance agent in 1935, a ballistician in 1949, and a gunsmith in 1954. Vernor and Mary did not have any children. There are a few mentions of Vernor in the local papers. The Marion County Historical Society, in a newsletter describing the history of Bush's Pasture Park has this quote referencing Vernor: "Vernor Sackett remembers wandering along its [the Bush's Pasture Park] path in school days. 'We have our

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[111] Ibid., 105.
[112] *Polk's Salem City and Marion County Directory* Volume 19 (Portland: R.L. Polk & Co., 1928-1929), 308.

garden raided by pheasants and our homes menaced by its fires.'"[113] Vernor died on December 7, 1965 at only sixty-seven years old.

The biggest mystery of the photographs, then, remains Vernor. We know very little about his life and his character compared to Sheldon. And Leland also has somewhat of a legacy, with a large family of descendants still living in the Pacific Northwest. But we have Vernor's photographs. We can see how, for at least a short time in his life, Vernor saw the world. We can see what Vernor thought was important to remember, to capture about young adult life in the twentieth century.

We also have Mary, his wife. She is never listed as having a job, but in the Marion County Historical Society Records are letters she wrote to her class in an annual alumni letter book. So besides the photographs, the closest we can get to Vernor is through Mary. After Vernor died, she lived on in Salem in the same house for just over twenty more years. By that time, she would have been well into her eighties, maybe even ninety years old. She must have stayed in touch with her friends from Willamette, and it seems like she may have been involved with the university throughout her life. Just as Vernor constructed his memory of Willamette through the photographs, Mary constructed her memory of Willamette through these letters. And her writing is just as beautiful as are Vernor's photographs.

In 1981 she wrote: "But how can I comply with this demand [to send a letter every year] when my only accomplishment has been to survive? It is not something in which I take any confident pride. It has a very uncertain future, surely."[114] In 1982: "So we draw the circle a little closer and are thankful that we have known the friendship and the fellowship of our classmates

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[113] Don A. Roberts, "Bush's Pasture Park: The history of its acquisition by the city of Salem," *Marion County Historical Society Quarterly* Volume 37, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 1.
[114] Mary Notson Sackett, *60th Anniversary Letter Class of 1921 Willamette University* (1981), Marion County Historical Society.

who have gone on before us."[115] In 1983: "Its [sic] awfully hard to report years of 'goings and comings' when one has not been anywhere."[116] Mary died on December 1, 1986. She wrote her last letter to the alumni from her class in 1984: "The world is interesting and exciting now, even though a bit scary. I sometimes wish I were young and able to participate, and again, I'm glad I'm almost through. I'm so glad to have lived in this century, and in this period of unprecedented development. Knowledge has indeed 'increased' beyond belief. Those years at Willamette were so precious, and had a quality rarely matched then or now. May we all meet in the heavenly pastures even if we don't get together here again. Affectionately, Mary."[117]

By using this historiographical methodology—photographs as primary source documents, not as illustrations to text—I've set up a particular narrative about the lives of the Sackett brothers. That narrative is a biography, but told with the photographs; it emphasizes the archival experience and how photographs influence how we construct memory, particularly in the digital age. I began researching and writing this story with the question of how the Sackett brothers fit into traditional narratives of the twentieth century. But that question was complicated by my own position as a student studying history at a small, liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest, the same university that the subjects of my research attended. The themes of analysis I saw in the photographs of race, gender, and masculinity are all themes that have been especially relevant in my own four years at Willamette.

When I talk about the photographs, a lot of people have asked me about what makes them significant. I think one of the underlying questions there, at least it is something with which I

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[115] Mary Notson Sackett, *61st Anniversary Letter Class of 1921 Willamette University* (1982), Marion County Historical Society.
[116] Mary Notson Sackett, *62nd Anniversary Letter Class of 1921 Willamette University* (1983), Marion County Historical Society.
[117] Mary Notson Sackett, *63rd Anniversary Letter Class of 1921 Willamette University* (1984), Marion County Historical Society.

have struggled, is why do we need one more history of an upper-middle class, white man? And from what I have seen, the Sacketts could fit that narrative very well. Fred and Hattie were conservative people who moved west with the promise of land, probably thinking that there was good money in that. Fred became involved in various societies and eventually became a county judge. Leland, after serving in World War I, owned an insurance company, and has left the legacy of a rather large family. In his infamous journalism career, Sheldon also has a legacy of sorts. And Vernor has left his legacy with his photographs. He had enough money to buy cameras and films and to create a collection that an archive has deemed worthy of preservation.

But of course, I want these men to be special, to have contributed enough they deserve a place in Oregon history. I want these photographs to be historically significant. This desire, of course, is clouded by my own idea that every single person who has lived has value and a place in history. So I can come up with a lot of reasons for why these photographs are significant, reasons that I want so badly to be true. I want Fred and Hattie to be groundbreaking Oregon pioneers who personified the American dream. I want Sheldon to be an influential actor in Oregon history, politics, and journalism. And I want Vernor to have been this amazing amateur photographer who didn't know the quality and value of his work, and is now being rediscovered as an important early twentieth century American photographer. But I do not know if any of that is really true. What I know so far is that Fred and Hattie came to Oregon in the late nineteenth century to farm like a lot of people did. I know that Sheldon did have a successful career in journalism, but he might have just been a newspaper publisher who left some interesting stories behind. And maybe Vernor just had a hobby for brief time. That would be one way to tell their story.

Another way to tell their story, the narrative I wrote, emphasizes that these photographs are important because they exist. With these photographs, we are able to see what a man thought was important, and what he chose to document about his life. Vernor constructed a record of his life in a particular time and place. He did not leave a lot of information about himself, but, when telling this narrative through the photographs, that does not completely matter. It's always been about these photographs and how they show us how a young man in the twentieth century constructed his own history, and what he thought was important to be remembered. It just so happens that he did so quite beautifully.

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