

CALL FOR PAPERS

William Gilmore Simms Society Sessions

37th Annual American Literature Association Conference

May 20-23, 2026, Chicago, Illinois

Panel One: Antebellum Editors, Agents, Publishers, and Mentors

In addition to penning fiction and poetry, being a Man of Letters was for William Gilmore Simms an endeavor that involved work encouraging authorship. Simms was an editor of cultural journals and newspapers, an advocate for the writers of Young America and the American South, and an advisor to peers and aspirational authors. These professional and personal vocations involved him in networks of similarly inclined editors, agents, publishers, and mentors across antebellum America.

This panel seeks presentations addressing topics related to experiences and relationships associated with authorship and publication in the United States prior to the Civil War. Papers may focus on any antebellum American author, editor, advocate, patron, publisher, or literary community, and could adopt historical, theoretical, or interdisciplinary approaches. Topics could include, but are not limited to:

- Editorial labor in antebellum print culture
- The role of publishers, agents, and mentors in authorship and reputation
- Publishing firms and periodicals as facilitators of literary communities
- Friendships, patronage, and other informal support networks among authors
- “Puffing” and the role of reviews
- Gender, race, ethnicity and access to mentorship and publication
- Overlooked editors and publishers in antebellum print culture
- Local or regional networks of editors, publishers, and writers
- Trans-regional or trans-Atlantic antebellum literary networks
- Rivalries or competing communities and publishers

Graduate students are particularly encouraged to submit proposals. A competitive travel stipend is available for a graduate student attendee.

To submit a proposal, please send a title and abstract of no more than 250 words to John Miller at millerjd@longwood.edu or Sam Lackey at sam.lackey@gbcnv.edu. Please use “Simms ALA Panel 2026 Submission” for the subject line. The deadline for submissions is January 15, 2026.

Panel Two: New Directions in William Gilmore Simms Scholarship

The apocryphal story that the delegates to the Southern Commercial Convention in 1856 resolved “that there be a Southern literature” and “that William Gilmore Simms, LL.D. write this literature” speaks to the association of Simms with the region’s *belles-lettres* in the minds of his fellow white southerners. The author of more than thirty novels and a dozen volumes of poetry (not to mention biographies, histories, speeches, criticism and innumerable articles for periodicals), Simms was instrumental in fashioning a regional consciousness prior to and in the decade after the Civil War. Simms was also a national and trans-Atlantic author as well, actively participating in the traffic of ideas, a network of authors, and the publishing world outside the American South. His long career, grand aspirations, and prolificacy across diverse genres make the author and his work relevant to many critical, theoretical, and historical perspectives. This open topic panel invites new scholarship on Simms, his oeuvre, his milieu, and his legacy.

Analyses of any aspect of Simms’s work, career, networks, and influence are welcome. Topics could include, but are not limited to:

- The body, including the grotesque and 19th-century conceptions of the body, including notions of race and character.
- Emotion, including affective dimensions of Simms’s texts (and the response of readers) or Simms’s own emotional biography.
- Trauma, including that of characters in his work or Simms’s own experiences.
- Intimacy, including textual representations of romantic and homosocial relationships or Simms’s and his peers’ own emotional and intellectual bonds.
- Class and social structure in the mid-nineteenth century, including emergent middle and professional classes.
- Public memory, including the creation and use of historical narratives.
- Race and ethnicity, including constructions of race and ethnicity or theories of romantic nationalism.
- Genre and form, including changes in the novel, innovations in meter, and hybrid genres.

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