

**Twice Forty Years of Learning:
An Educational Biography of Robert Reid Howison (1820-1906)**

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Abstract

The two primary purposes of this study were to develop an educational biography on the life of Robert Reid Howison, a nineteenth-century Virginia lawyer, minister, historian, and author, and to examine Howison's efforts as an educator.

Chapter One presents an approach to the study, guiding questions, and the research methodology of educational biography. Chapter Two examines Howison's learning experiences during his childhood and youth, from his birth in 1820 to 1841. These learning experiences were primarily connected with institutions of education, such as family, school, church, work, as well as his self-initiated learning and membership in a learning society. Chapter Two analyzes Howison's learning experiences during his prime adult years, 1841-1870, and discusses how, as an adult, family became less of an institution influencing his learning and became more of an opportunity to educate others. His self-initiated learning, coupled with institutions of education in the community, became more prominent during these years. His first book, *A History of Virginia From It's Discovery and Settlement*, revealed Howison both as a learner and educator as he conducted the necessary research for the book with the intent to teach the history of Virginia to the young men of the day. He also contributed other scholarship efforts such as writing a complete history of the Civil War. Chapter Four details Howison's later years, from 1870 to his death in 1906. During this time he authored two additional major works, *God and Creation* and *A Students' History of the United States*. Many of Howison's shorter works written during these years, such as newspaper and periodical articles, reveal his philosophy of education. Howison was also a lecturer on American History at Fredericksburg College, an event combining his work as an educator with his lifelong interest in reading and writing history. Chapter Five presents conclusions and recommendations to the study, particularly concerning the research methodology of educational biography as applied to the life of Robert Howison. His detailed description of his lifelong learning experiences, as described in his unpublished autobiography *Twice Forty Years of American Life*, were useful in establishing the significant learning experiences throughout his life as well as documenting the outcomes or results of his learning.

Acknowledgments

I first learned about Robert Reid Howison when my husband and I were still dating, and he took me to visit his family homeplace, *Braehead*, in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The house was not in use since my husband's grandmother (Robert Howison's granddaughter) had moved to a nursing home. While receiving a tour of the house, as I entered Howison's bedroom, I sensed that someone was in the room. I immediately looked around and saw no one; however, the presence of that particular room struck me differently than any of the other rooms in the house. After perusing the remaining volumes of his library as well as other personal effects, such as his furniture and the house itself, I became curious about this nineteenth-century personality. When I learned of the existence of his unpublished autobiography, I began to realize that Howison's life and work had been forgotten too long. Therefore, he became the subject of my study, and I humbly hope that my work will bring renewed honor to one most deserving.

Many thanks are due to individuals who assisted and supported me in accomplishing this study. First of all, I thank my parents who have always offered their support, emotionally and financially, in helping me reach my goals, particularly concerning my own education. Additionally, I would like to thank members of the Howison family, some posthumously, who have so carefully preserved their history and my in-laws for graciously allowing me to use these family artifacts. I also thank my husband for his support in keeping soul and body together while conducting the study and for his insistence to "just get it done!" Additional thanks go to Rommel Stephens who stayed by my side throughout this process.

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