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8-30-2000

# The Eponymous Mr. Prince

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## Repository Citation

Wilkes, Donald E. Jr., "The Eponymous Mr. Prince" (2000). *Popular Media*. 35.  
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## An Article on Oliver Hillhouse Prince

### The Eponymous Mr. Prince

An eponym, the dictionary tells us, is a name formed from the name of a person to designate a place, and an eponymous person is someone for whom a place has been named. Prince Avenue, the wide Athens street which stretches west almost exactly two miles from Pulaski Street to the Jefferson Road, is an eponym. Described as "once one of the nation's finest boulevards" by Frances Taliaferro Thomas in her excellent book [A Portrait of Historic Athens and Clarke County](#) (1992), but now dotted with professional buildings, fast food businesses, and parking lots, Prince Avenue was named after a renowned Georgian, now nearly forgotten, who lived in Athens for less than two years. This man, Oliver Hillhouse Prince, may, therefore, appropriately be called the eponymous Mr. Prince.

Oliver Hillhouse Prince, the man for whom Prince Avenue was named, was a transplanted Connecticut Yankee who became such a great Georgian that [Men of Mark in Georgia](#) (1974), an elaborate, multi-volume history of this state, rightfully labels him "one of the brilliant figures in Georgia in the first half of the nineteenth century." "Mr. Prince," a Georgia newspaper wrote in 1913, "was one of that splendid galaxy of men who came equipped with education and inspired by ambition and patriotism from New England and the Middle States to Georgia and in deed 'illustrated' Georgia, as much as did her native sons."

Oliver H. Prince has been justly called "a man of many talents" and "something of a renaissance man." He was a U. S. Senator. He was a newspaper editor, a journalist, and a story writer. He was the author of a humorous sketch brazenly plagiarized by a distinguished English novelist. He was a highly respected lawyer. He wrote a law book that became a Georgia legal classic. He was instrumental in bringing railroads to Georgia. He even laid out the streets of one of Georgia's major cities.

Oliver Prince died at age 55, a victim of what Lucian Lamar Knight, in his [Georgia's Landmarks, Memorials, and Legends](#) (1914), calls "one of the saddest catastrophes in the history of the State." He had the enormous misfortune to board a ship which unknowingly sailed into the middle of what historian Jay Barnes describes as "one of the most infamous hurricanes of the nineteenth century."

Prince was born on July 31, 1782 in Montville, Connecticut, about 40 miles from New Haven. In 1796, when he was 14 years old, he moved with his family to Washington, Georgia, the county seat of Wilkes county, where he would live for the next 26 years. In 1790 Wilkes county was the largest county in Georgia, and about half the state's population lived in Wilkes county and the surrounding area.

Although he was well educated and widely read, Prince received very little formal schooling. From 1803 until 1806 he was an assistant editor of [The Monitor](#), a Wilkes county newspaper. In 1806 he was admitted to the bar and began a career as an attorney. For the next 16 years he rode circuit with the

judges and other lawyers of the Northern Circuit, traveling from county to county on horseback to try cases in log cabins and other makeshift courtrooms. When the day's legal work was done, Prince and his colleagues traveling the circuit would sit around a crackling fire at night and gossip, tell jokes, and exchange stories. Prince's storytelling was so entertaining that he soon "acquired a reputation for the brilliance of his refined, classically turned wit," according to Virginia King Nirenstein in her inspiring book With Kindly Voices (1984), half of which is devoted to a biography of Prince. "[Prince's] sense of humor," Men of Mark in Georgia tells us, "is said by contemporaries to have been coupled with great kindness of heart, which made him not only a delightful companion, but a most popular man."

In 1813 Prince rode on horseback to Connecticut to visit his mother, who had moved back to her home state. In 1817 he married 18-year old Mary Ross Norman, of Lincoln county. In his book Sketches of the Some of the First Settlers of Upper Georgia (1855), Georgia Gov. Georgia Gilmer, who was a close friend of the Princes, remembered Mrs. Prince as "a very pretty and exceedingly amiable woman," and the marriage was a love match that endured.

In 1822 the couple's two young children died, and, perhaps out of grief, the Princes moved to newly created Bibb County. While living in Bibb county, the Princes had three more children, one son and two daughters. Prince's daughter Virginia, born in 1825, was his favorite child, and his last recorded words on earth were for her.

In early 1823 Oliver Prince was one of five commissioners who selected the site, and actually drew the plat, of the city of Macon. As an old Macon newspaper column says: "It was to Oliver Hillhouse Prince's wisdom and foresight that Macon owes her wide streets." In March 1823 Prince bought a piece of land at Fifth and Plum Streets in Macon and soon opened his law office there.

Men of Mark in Georgia recounts that Prince was "a brilliant and strong lawyer," and, according to Ms. Nirenstein, Prince's law practice "was very successful."

In 1828 the General Assembly by a one-vote majority elected Prince to fill the unexpired term of U. S. Senator Thomas W. Cobb, who had resigned. Prince served in the Twentieth Congress as one of Georgia's two Senators from November 1828 until March 1829.

After residing in Bibb county for nine years, in early 1832 at the age of 49 Prince closed his law office and gave up the practice of law, moving to Milledgeville, then the state capital, where he purchased and edited an influential newspaper, the Georgia Journal. In late 1835 he sold the newspaper and retired. In early 1836 Prince moved to Athens, where he had recently bought a 450-acre farm.

Prince arrived in Athens on Feb. 1, 1836. He left Athens on May 25, 1837, departing on a fatal journey to the North which ended abruptly when on their way back he and his wife were lost at sea in a maritime disaster that was the Titanic of its time. Thus, Prince resided in Athens for only 16 months.

The actual location of Prince's Athens farm is in dispute, but it appears that he owned almost all the land between Hill Street and Prince Avenue, as well as land on the north side of Prince Avenue. The historic Franklin-Upson house, 1022 Prince Avenue, which was erected in 1847 and now houses Suntrust

Bank, was built on land once part of Prince's farm.

The location of Prince's residence is also disputed. It is believed by some historians to have been in the vicinity of what is now the Navy School; other historians think Prince's residence was on the site of the Georgia Power building at the intersection of Prince Avenue and Chase Street.

At the time Prince arrived in Athens the city's streets had no official names. The street leading to Prince's farm was then unofficially known as the Federal road because it was the main road leading through Jefferson and Gainesville to the Cherokee Indian Nation. In 1859 the segment of the Federal road in Athens west of downtown was officially named Prince Avenue. It seems likely that decades before 1859 the portion of the Federal road leading to Prince's farm had already, unofficially, become known as Prince Avenue.

Prince's greatest single achievement was his authorship of a landmark compilation of Georgia laws dating back to the colonial era. In 1819 Prince was commissioned by the General Assembly to compile a digest of all Georgia statutory laws then in force in this state. In 1822, after nearly two years of exhaustive and painstaking legal research and writing, Prince published A Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia. Consisting of 576 pages of text and a 94 page index, the Digest set forth the text of all nonlocal statutes then in effect in Georgia, with the various statutory provisions grouped together under 64 titles alphabetically arranged, beginning with "Affirmation" and ending with "Western Territory." The Digest also contained explanatory notes, a list of repealed statutes, and an authoritative discussion of the writ of habeas corpus. The Digest, as stated by Georgia Gov. John Clark, was "finished in a style of great accuracy and perspicuity." It was, in short, the first great law book authored by a Georgian.

Prince's Digest instantly became indispensable to Georgia judges and lawyers. Many years later a 19th century Georgia judge, Richard Clark, remembered being a 14-year old spectator at a trial where all the lawyers repeatedly quoted from the Prince's Digest, and thinking at the time that whoever this man Prince was, he must be the greatest man in the state! The second edition of Prince's Digest was published in 1837; it was similar to the first edition, except that it was even more voluminous, comprising 929 pages of text and 116 pages of index.

It was while he was en route back to Athens from a trip to the North where he had arranged for the publication of the second edition that Prince perished in what a newspaper of the time called "a calamitous and heart rending disaster." This was why Josephine Mellichamp, in her biographical entry for Oliver Prince in her book Senators From Georgia (1976), curiously wrote: "A book led to his death."

To distinguish it from the second edition, after 1837 the first edition of the Digest acquired the affectionate nickname of Little Prince. The second edition served as the most important collection of Georgia laws until 1851, when it was superseded by a law digest written by an Athens attorney, the legendary Thomas R. R. Cobb. For 30 years Prince's Digest had been an absolute necessity for lawyers and judges in this state. Today Prince's Digest remains an authoritative source for anyone who wishes to study pre-Civil War Georgia law, and no respectable Georgia legal library is really complete without a copy of either the first or the second edition.

Prince's greatest claim to literary fame, however, is not his Digest, but a witty short story he wrote which, in a case of what has quite correctly been called

"palpable plagiarism," was later "lifted" by the writer Thomas Hardy for inclusion in one of his novels.

In the early 1800's, while living in Wilkes county, Prince wrote many humorous articles published in The Monitor, the local newspaper. The articles confirm the observation of Kenneth Coleman and Charles Gurrin in their Dictionary of Georgia Biography (1983), that Prince was "[r]emarkably gifted with the literary instinct which he possessed with the most delicious sense of humor." "He [Oliver Prince] possessed," Lucian Lamar Knight has written, "a keen sense of humor, associated with rare literary gifts."

One of Prince's articles, untitled and published anonymously, appeared in The Monitor on June 6, 1807. This amusing sketch, the best of all his witty pieces, was a satirical account of the vain, clumsy efforts of a certain Captain Clodpole to drill an unruly, inept detachment of the Georgia militia. The sketch was wildly popular and reprinted many times by various newspapers and even translated into several foreign languages. It also appeared in Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's famous book Georgia Scenes, published in 1835 and reprinted ten times during the 19th century.

In 1880, Thomas Hardy published his novel The Trumpet Major, which takes place in England during the Napoleonic Wars. Chapter 23 of the novel, "Military Preparations on an Extended Scale," contains passages describing a militia drill, in a small village in rural England, of raw recruits who are supposed to be training for the possibility of a French invasion. Within two years of the novel's publication charges that the militia drill scene in the novel had been plagiarized from an American author were being made in newspapers. In an article entitled "Will Mr. Hardy Explain?", one correspondent wrote in 1882, "It will need no acuteness of vision to see that there is something more than an accidental similarity between the description given by Mr. Hardy ... and the American sketch."

Space limitations prevent reproducing, for comparison purposes, the entire Prince sketch and the relevant passages of the twenty-third chapter of Hardy's novel. However, placing only a few portions of the two works in parallel columns should make it clear beyond any doubt that Hardy appropriated Prince's sketch:

Prince Hardy

"But as every man was anxious to see how the rest stood, those on the wings pressed forward for that purpose, till the whole line assumed nearly the form of a crescent."	"Every man was anxious to see how the rest stood, those at the end of the line pressed forward for that purpose, till the line assumed the form of horseshoe."
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\* \* \*

"This was accordingly done; but impelled by the same motives as before, they soon resumed their former figure, and so they were permitted to remain."	"They dressed forthwith; but impelled by the same motive they soon resumed their former figure, and so they were despairingly permitted to remain."
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""Tention the whole! left-left, no-right-that is, the left- I mean the right, left, wheel, march!"	"Tention! To the right-left wheel. I mean-no, no-right wheel. Mar-r-r-rch!"
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Even though the charges of plagiarism were weighty and repeated over and over again in American and English periodicals, Hardy refused for years to

make a public reply. "Hardy combined the activities of 'Brer Fox' and the Tar-Baby: he lay low and said nothing," Carl J. Weber, a leading authority on Hardy, caustically commented. Privately, however, in an 1882 letter to an American book editor, Hardy dismissed the charges, claiming that the novel's drill scene was "based on a letter of an eyewitness" and that all that had happened was that "a page or two of historical and biographical matter ha[d] been embodied in fiction ...." Actually, of course, the drill scene was based, not on a work of history or biography, but on a story that was obviously a piece of satirical fiction. Carl Weber has observed that Hardy's letter "shows either careless reading or an uneasy conscience."

Fifteen years after The Trumpet Major was published literary critics were still complaining that Hardy was ignoring the serious charge of plagiarism against him. Finally, in 1896, in a public reply to the charge, Hardy wrote a published letter to a literary magazine admitting that some of the details of his drill scene had been "suggested" by a description of militia in an 1817 book on the Napoleonic Wars, "a description which I understood to refer to the English peasantry." Written by C. H. Gifford, the 1817 history book Hardy cited had reproduced Prince's sketch in its entirety in a chapter entitled "Satire upon American Discipline." In his book, Gifford explained that he had included the chapter to "give some idea of American tactics." In view of this, Hardy's assertion that he had once understood the sketch to refer to English peasants appears dissembling. As for his claim that the sketch "suggested" his drill scene, the fact is, as Carl Weber has noted, that Hardy's borrowing from Prince amounted to "about two hundred and sixty words, together with the general purport of three full pages of the novel."

In 1896, when a new edition of The Trumpet Major was published, Hardy added a preface in which he again stonewalled. Hardy wrote: "The drilling scene of the local militia received some additions from an account given in so grave a work as Gifford's History of the Wars of the French Revolution .... But on reference to the History I find I was mistaken in supposing the account to be advanced as authentic or to refer to rural England." Once again Hardy was struggling to deny the undeniable—that he had been exposed as a common plagiarist. He had not merely "received some additions." And it is impossible to believe that Hardy was truthful in claiming that he had once believed Prince's humorous satire about rural Georgia to be "authentic [history]" or to "refer to rural England."

Hardy is known to have plagiarized other authors, but his lifting of Prince's sketch is the most notorious. Indeed, it is one of the most clearly demonstrated examples in literary history of a great novelist stealing the intellectual property of another author. Hardy's weak and evasive denials of the charge that parts of Chapter 23 of The Trumpet Major had been stolen from another author constitute, in Carl Weber's memorable words, "fight[ing] in eggshell armor." Amazingly, therefore, it is a matter of historical fact that Prince Avenue was named after a man who, among his other achievements, wrote a story that incontrovertibly was plagiarized by Thomas Hardy.

#### [Read Part II of This Article](#)

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Wilkes, Donald E., Jr., "The Eponymous Mr. Prince" Flagpole Magazine 30 Aug. 2000: page 10.

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## An Article on Oliver Hillhouse Prince: Part II

### The Eponymous Mr. Prince: Part II

Prince strongly believed that railroads were essential to developing Georgia's economy, and in 1831 he presided over the state's first Railroad Convention, which met in Eatonton to devise plans for bringing the railroad to Georgia. He was one of the first stockholders and directors of the Georgia Railroad Company.

- On Aug. 2, 1832 Prince published in the Georgia Journal a light-hearted letter he had written in Athens about a University of Georgia graduation ceremony he had recently attended.
- Prince was a trustee of the University of Georgia and after his death a memorial service for him and his wife was held in the University Chapel.
- A number of Prince's letters and papers are preserved in the Special Collections Division of the University of Georgia Main Library.
- Prince's son, Oliver H. Prince, Jr., died in 1875 and is buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery. His daughter Virginia died in 1905 and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Macon.
- The house Prince built in Washington, Georgia in 1810 and where he lived with his wife for five years still stands at Liberty and Pope Streets. Privately owned and now known as Poplar Grove, the magnificent white columned house is billed in Wilkes county tourist promotional literature as "the only full developed Beaux-arts classical revival structure in town."
- Apart from Prince Avenue here in Athens, the only other places in Georgia named after Prince are in Macon, where there is both a Prince Street and a tiny municipal park, little more than a grassy street median at the corner of Poplar and Third Streets, which was designated Prince Park many years ago. Unfortunately, the metal marker bearing Prince's name has been removed from the park, and today even the Macon parks and recreation department is unaware of the fact that the park is named after Prince.

On Tuesday, May 23, 1837, shortly before beginning the ill-fated journey to the North, Oliver Prince wrote a letter to his son, Oliver H. Prince, Jr., who was at school in Gwinnett county. To that letter Mary Prince added a postscript containing a sentence which, Ms. Nirenstein notes, was "very premonitory": "My son, if I never see you more, remember my last words would be 'remember your Creator in the days of your youth' ...."

Two days later, Oliver and Mary Prince set out for the North. The purpose of the trip was to visit Boston to arrange for the publication of the second edition of the Digest; but while up North the Princes would also take the opportunity to visit relatives and friends in New York state. Accompanied as far as Virginia by Gov. George Gilmer and his wife, the Princes traveled from Athens to Wilkes county, then to Augusta and Charleston, then by steamboat to Norfolk, then to Baltimore and Philadelphia, then by steamboat to New York City, then by another steamboat to Providence, and then by railroad to

Boston, where they arrived June 9.

During the next several months Oliver Prince spent a great deal of his time in Boston working on publication of the Digest, and the rest of the time with Mary in Watervliet and Troy, New York where Mary Prince was staying with relatives. Both Princes missed their children back in Georgia terribly, and both, especially Mary Prince, grew homesick for Athens. One of the New York cousins with whom the Princes stayed later wrote: "[Mary Prince] was impatient to get home, and every day seemed to her an age until [her husband's] return [from Boston] and their departure from the north .... She was continually in hopes that something would transpire to hasten his return and could scarcely be persuaded when by his own letters he assured it would not be sooner than he had anticipated. The constant state of expectation and consequent disappointment seemed to play upon her spirits and health, and her feeling excited my heartfelt sympathy. They remained but a day or two after Mr. Prince's return .... So great was their impatience to get on that they could not be persuaded to remain a day, but took leave the morning of the day following [his] arrival .... On the day of their departure [from New York City] ... [I] went over the Atlantic Hotel to see them for the last time. They seemed in good health and spirits, and impatient to depart .... I was so much grieved at parting that I could scarcely speak a word. Cousin O[liver] took my hand, begged me to look at him once more, and said in a most affectionate manner, 'Good bye, my dear' ...."

On Saturday, October 7, 1837, the Princes boarded a steam packet ship, the S.S. Home, bound for Charleston. The Home had been in service for less than a year, and this was to be its third sea voyage. A vessel of 537 tons, 220 feet long and with a beam of 22 feet, the Home was propelled by two paddle-wheels mounted amidships; in addition, like most steamboats of the time, the Home was equipped with masts, sails, and rigging. According to Eric Hause's magazine article, The Wreck of the Home, the ship had been "originally constructed for river trade, [but then] converted into a passenger liner .... The ship's interior was paneled in deep mahogany and cherry wood with breathtaking skylights, saloons, and luxurious passenger quarters .... [The] Home [was] the most plush vessel of its type." Although \$115,000 had been spent converting the Home for ocean voyages, it was equipped with only three lifeboats and two life preservers.

When the Home cast off its moorings from the New York wharf around 4 p.m. that Saturday afternoon, with about 90 passengers and 40 crew on board, there was only a slight wind and the weather was beautiful. No one aboard could even have imagined that this ship was heading straight into the path of Racer's Storm, "one of the most famous and destructive hurricanes of the century," according to David Ludlam's Early American Hurricanes (1963). This cataclysmic storm, Ludlam says, "has lived long in memory, partly from its apt name, but more so as a result of its extreme duration and the immensity of its path of destruction covering more than two thousand miles." Racer's Storm, the first recorded hurricane to rake both the Gulf coast and the Atlantic coast, was first encountered in the central Caribbean on September 28 by the English war ship H. M. S. Racer, for whom the hurricane was named.

Moving northwest, Racer's Storm had by October 3 sliced through Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and was rushing through the Gulf of Mexico toward Brownsville Texas, near the mouth of the Rio Grande. As the monstrous storm approached the coast, Ludlam says, "the dynamics of recurvature slowed the storm's progress and turned it gradually into the north and then the northeast." The terrible hurricane then roared through the trend of the



shoreline of the Gulf, pulverizing Galveston on October 4, New Orleans on October 6, and Mobile on October 7 (the day the Home left New York wharf). The storm then headed northeast, smashing into parts of Alabama and Florida, central Georgia, and central South Carolina, and on October 8 entered the Atlantic Ocean somewhere between Charleston and Wilmington. On October 9 the hurricane crossed North Carolina's Outer Banks at the very time the Home was navigating the waters off the North Carolina coast. It was around noon on Sunday, October 8, when the ship was east of Chesapeake Bay, that those on the Home saw the first ominous indications of a storm, and by afternoon the seas were heavy and the winds increasing steadily. The ship struggled through the violent weather and seas, and by 3 p.m. that Sunday had sprung a leak. Soon both crew and passengers were bailing water and manning the ship's hand pumps. Despite these efforts, the ship began to fill with water, and soon three huge waves crashed over the ship, punching holes in several windows. By now the ship was in the Graveyard of the Atlantic, as the ocean off the coast of North Carolina has been known for 200 years. Its masts unsteady and its sails useless or torn, its hull waterlogged, and its steam engines weakened by the rolling of the vessel and the rising water in the boiler rooms, the Home was now definitely doomed. Around 8 p.m. on Monday the furnace fires went out, and the Home's captain decided his only option was to try to beach the ship on the shore. He headed the ship toward the beach on Ocracoke Island, part of North Carolina's Outer Banks.

At 10 p.m., about 100 yards from shore, the Home struck a reef and grounded parallel to the shoreline, exposing the ship to the full force of the huge waves which thunderously swept over it, one after another. With each wave, part of the ship was swept away. Many of the female passengers lined themselves up on the side of the ship nearest the shore, but with each crushing wave some of them were carried off into the raging surf. The captain, who survived, later wrote that as the passengers were washed off the ship "their shrieks and cries ... were appalling and heart-rending beyond description."

Gov. George Gilmer later wrote about what he had been able to discover about the final hours of Oliver and Mary Prince on the Home: "Mr. Prince took command of the hands at the pump, where his self-possession and strong strokes showed that he worked for a nobler purpose than fear for his own life. When exhausted by his efforts, he joined his wife, to devote himself to her safety. The self-sacrificing nature of Mrs. Prince would not yield to the temptation of clinging to her husband, when his exertions might be necessary to the safety of others on board. She urged him to return to his efforts at the pump. Immediately afterwards she attempted to obey the advice of the Captain, to remove from one part of the vessel to another less exposed to the danger.

"As she stepped out of the cabin into an open space, a wave passed over and through the vessel, and carried her into the ocean.... Mr. Prince, resuming his labors at the pump, was spared the pangs of knowing the fate of his wife. To a young man who lived to report the story, Mr. Prince said: 'Remember me to my child, Virginia.' If there was aught else the uproar of the ocean prevented its being heard. No account was ever given of the last struggle for life by those who worked at the pump. In a great heave of the ocean, the vessel parted asunder and went to the bottom."

The wreck of the Home was, according to Eric Hause, "the most deadly sea disaster on American shores at the time," and newspapers printed numerous

accounts of the tragedy and its aftermath. "The dreadful catastrophe which befell the ship, Mr. and Mrs. Prince, and almost all the passengers," Gov. Gilmer wrote, "made such an impression upon the whole country that the event is still freshly remembered by every one, whenever the bursting of boilers, the burning of steamers, and the wreck of vessels are mentioned." The Home's captain even wrote an instant best-selling book about the catastrophe. Around 90 people died, most of them women and children. The bodies of many of the victims, including the Princes, were never recovered.

Many obituaries for the Princes were published. The most notable obituary was published in a Georgia newspaper two weeks after the shipwreck. Concerning Oliver Prince it said: "Mr. Prince for more than twenty-five years was a practitioner of law in this state, and though not an eloquent speaker, was at all times interesting and convincing. Truth was his polar star, and to arrive at that, he regarded not the ruggedness of the way. He was well versed in the hidden mysteries of this intricate science .... He was safe in counsel, and scrupulously honest in all matters of trust and confidence. As a writer, he was spirited, perspicuous, and witty...."

Years later the three children of the Princes erected a cenotaph for their parents in Rose Hill Cemetery in Macon. The cenotaph is still there, although it has fallen over and now lies flat on the earth, face up. Paraphrasing from the Bible (2 Samuel 1: 23), the following inscription has been carved into the upper half of the marble slab: "OLIVER HILLHOUSE PRINCE and MARY R. PRINCE, who perished in the wreck of the steamship 'Home.' 'They were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided.'" Near the bottom is inscribed: "This tablet is erected to perpetuate the beloved memory of our parents by their bereaved and sorrowing children."

In an Athens newspaper article intended to resuscitate the memory of Oliver Prince and published many years ago, John A. Cobb wrote: "There are too many instances in our history of achievements of men, of whose memories we should feel proud, [who] are allowed to pass into oblivion ...."

The present article on the eponymous Mr. Prince has been written with the same purpose as Cobb's old article: "to revive with the living the memories of the dead ... that the dead may not, amid the exigencies of busy life, be entirely forgotten." The present author will have succeeded, therefore, if, the next time you drive down Prince Avenue, you remember something about the almost totally forgotten Oliver Hillhouse Prince-you recollect, for example, that, incredibly, the street you are on was named for the Athenian who was plagiarized by Thomas Hardy!

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