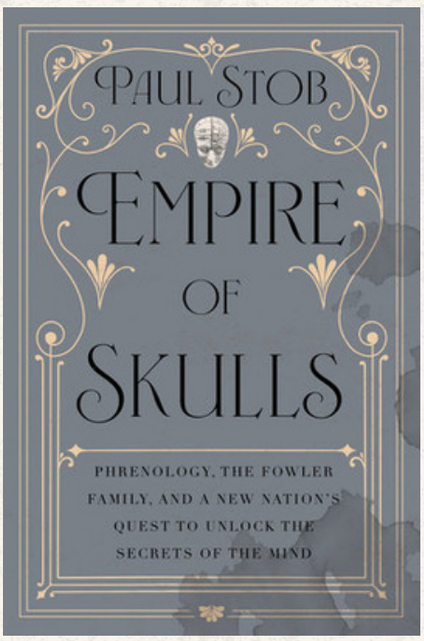
PAUL STOB
EMPIRE OF SKULLS

> In this original and compelling book, Paul Stob sheds light on a forgotten but vital moment in American life. Absorbing, eloquent, and insightful, *Empire of Skulls* is nonfiction at its best, an indelible tale that surprises, entertains, and instructs.
>
> —Jon Meacham, Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* bestselling author



The fascinating history of a strange science and the colorful characters who turned an enticing theory into a cultural phenomenon.

Discovered in Europe and popularized in the U.S. in the decades before the Civil War, phrenology captured the imagination of millions of Americans thanks largely to the efforts of siblings Orson, Lorenzo, and Charlotte Fowler. The science of phrenology was premised on a simple yet revolutionary idea: The bumps on your head mirror those on your brain, and they are the keys to your past, present, and future. Spreading this message of hope to all parts of the country, the Fowler family preached a scientific gospel perfectly fitted to the problems and possibilities of a growing nation. From the displays at their popular Phrenological Cabinet in New York to their lectures across the country to the thousands of books and periodicals they shipped to their followers monthly, the Fowlers built an empire that prefigures the goals of many self-help movements today.

The author is available to speak on such topics as:

- How a new science propelled some of the most significant reforms in American history, including abolitionism, woman suffrage, public education, temperance, and greater embrace of democracy.
- The remarkable success of the entrepreneurial Fowler siblings, which included a wildly popular NYC emporium and a publishing empire that shipped more than 100,000 items a month.
- Why many of the most prominent Americans of the day—including William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Henry Ward Beecher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman—embraced phrenology.
- Orson Fowler's design for the Octagon House—a quirky yet prominent moment in the development of American architecture.
- How phrenology took a darker turn as the Civil War threatened American optimism and progressive beliefs.
- An early and highly influential effort at self-help that paved the way for our current attempts to quantify ourselves, decipher our natures, and improve our lives and the world around us.
- How to give a phrenology exam to yourself and others!

Paul Stob is Director of the Program in Culture, Advocacy, and Leadership at Vanderbilt University, where his research focuses on American intellectual culture in the 19th century, with an emphasis on the influence of reading, writing, and lecturing on religion, democracy, and social movements.

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