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STATE AND REGIONAL ARCHIVAL ORGANIZATIONS SERVE THE SOUTHEAST

Virginia J. H. Cain

The Southeast may well claim to be home to more state and regional archival activity than any other region of the United States. Six state archival organizations are headquartered in the Southeast, while two others border on this area. Two regional archival organizations affect the Southeast, and the third oldest state organization and the oldest regional organization may be found here as well.

For purposes of this brief review, the Southeast will be defined as including Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Organizations described as state archival organizations will be those which are organized within and which focus upon a single state, while organizations called regional archival organizations will be those which are organized to encompass two or more states and which focus upon these broader areas. State and regional archival organizations are not mutually exclusive, but rather they frequently overlap, with a single state and individual archivists within that state involved in both a state and a regional group. In addition, no group prohibits individuals from other states or regions from becoming members or participants in some way in its activities.

The Society of American Archivists (SAA) was founded as the national professional organization for archivists in 1936, and thirty years later, the South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference (SAARC) brought to the Southeast the first organized archival activity that was not specifically a part of the more national focus of the SAA. Only one other non-national archival organization, the Michigan

Archival Association, founded in 1958, had been established prior to this pioneering effort by SAARC in May 1966. Covering those states along the southern Atlantic coast, SAARC involves Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.¹

SAARC has no constitution or bylaws, no formal officer structure, and no ongoing organization. It exists as an annual conference or meeting held each spring in a member state on a rotating basis. The original purpose of SAARC was to provide archivists, especially those new to the profession and those unable to attend SAA meetings, with a regular opportunity for professional development. Until 1981, a SAARC newsletter was circulated from the Archives Division of the Virginia State Library.

Responsibility for hosting the meeting and planning the program usually falls to the state archives in the host state, and conference programs frequently focus on the management of public records.² Not all programs, however, have been exclusively for archivists in state or other public archives, but have also included sessions on reference service, microform standards, disaster planning, and other topics that are of use to a broader audience of archivists. Recent programs have also provided a forum for the exchange of information on the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) Needs Assessment Grant projects in SAARC states.³

The other regional archival organization which touches the Southeast is the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC). Founded in 1972, MARAC claims members from Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and the District of Columbia. MARAC meets twice yearly, has a formal slate of officers, state representatives, and representatives-at-large, and publishes a quarterly newsletter, The Mid-Atlantic Archivist. The state of Virginia finds itself in a position unique among the eight states of the Southeast in that it is allied with two very

different regional archival organizations, SAARC and MARAC.

The six southeastern states which are home to state archival organizations are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The bordering states of Arkansas and Kentucky are also home to state archival organizations. Of these eight states, four are involved in regional archival organizations and four are not. Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina have ties with SAARC, while the border state of Arkansas is included in the geographic area covered by the Society of Southwest Archivists (SAA). Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and the bordering state of Kentucky have no affiliation with regional organizations. The other Southeastern states of Virginia and South Carolina are involved with SAARC but have no individual state archival organization.⁴ South Carolina archivists, however, have organized under the aegis of the state library association.

The Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA) was founded in 1969. Governance of the society is vested in a president, vice-president/president-elect, secretary/treasurer, archivist, newsletter editor, and two directors. All officers serve a one-year term with the exception of the directors who hold office for two-year terms, with one director elected each year. Balloting for officers is by mail prior to the fall annual meeting.

The society meets twice yearly: a fall workshop, traditionally held in Atlanta, and a spring meeting, traditionally held elsewhere in the state, provide educational and informational sessions for participants. The annual business meeting of the society is held in conjunction with the fall workshop. The SGA publishes a quarterly newsletter, SGA Newsletter, and a semiannual journal, Provenance (formerly Georgia Archive).⁵

The SGA was the third state archival group organized in the United States. Only the Michigan Archival Association, founded in 1958, and the Society of Ohio Archivists, founded in 1968, are

older. It was to be eight years before another state archival organization was to be formed in the Southeast. In those intervening years, only the organization of MARAC in 1972 was to have a direct effect on the Southeast.⁶

The year 1977 was the high water mark of archival organizing in the Southeast: the Society of Alabama Archivists (SALA) was formed in April, the Tennessee Archivists in September, and the Society of Mississippi Archivists in November.

The Society of Alabama Archivists is led by a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, newsletter editor, and three directors. An archivist is appointed by the executive board. The directors serve staggered terms of one, two, or three years, and all other officers serve for one year. Candidates for office are announced to the membership by mail, and the officers are elected by the society members present at the second semiannual meeting of the SALA. The society meets twice yearly, once in the spring and once in the fall, and publishes a newsletter entitled Access.⁷

Officers of the Tennessee Archivists are president, vice-president/editor, secretary (also serving as archivist), and treasurer. Unlike many other state archival organizations, officers of the Tennessee Archivists serve two-year terms. An officer may not succeed himself or herself in office, a retiring officer may not hold another office until at least one two-year term has elapsed, and no more than two officers serving at one time may come from the same institution.

The Tennessee Archivists meet annually in the spring of each year. The articles of incorporation, which serves also as the constitution and bylaws of the Tennessee Archivists, further specifies that this meeting be held at a middle Tennessee location. Members are notified by mail of the names of nominees for office, and elections and other business matters are decided by a simple majority vote of members present at the annual meeting. Additional meetings may be held to conduct workshops or other business,

and an occasional newsletter is published by the Tennessee Archivists.⁸

The leadership of the Society of Mississippi Archivists includes a president, vice-president, treasurer, executive director/secretary, newsletter editor, and four directors. A unique feature of this organization is the existence of the office of executive director, which also serves as secretary of the society. Executive directors are quite uncommon among American archival organizations, with only the SAA utilizing such a position. The Society of Mississippi Archivists meets annually in April and publishes a quarterly newsletter, The Primary Source.

The year 1977 also saw the formation of the Kentucky Council on Archives (KCA), one of two archival organizations in states which border on the Southeast. Governed by a chairperson, secretary-treasurer, and four administrative council members, the KCA meets twice yearly, in the spring and in the fall. The annual business meeting is held in the spring. The KCA began in 1979 to publish a regular newsletter, The Kentucky Archivist.⁹

No new state archival organizations were to come to the Southeast until 1983, but in 1979, another bordering state formed such an organization. The Arkansas Archivists and Records Managers, unique in that it specifically names an allied profession in the title of the organization, is led by a president, vice-president/president-elect, treasurer, and secretary. The organization meets annually for a fall workshop and publishes a quarterly newsletter.

The Society of Florida Archivists (SFA), formed in 1983, has as its leaders a president, vice-president/president-elect, secretary-treasurer, and two executive board members. Officers serve for a term of one year and are elected by a mail ballot. The annual business meeting of the SFA is held in the spring of each year and includes a program of general interest for SFA members.¹⁰ After Florida archivists attending the annual meeting of SAARC in St. Augustine, Florida, in the spring of 1982

expressed their desire to organize, the organizational meeting of the SFA was held in conjunction with the 1983 meetings of the Florida Historical Society and the Florida Historical Confederation.¹¹ A newsletter, SFA Newsletter, is planned as a regular publication to send to members and to exchange with other archival and related organizations.¹²

The newest archival organization in the Southeast is the Society of North Carolina Archivists. Organized in March 1984, the Society of North Carolina Archivists is the result of lengthy and careful planning under the leadership of the North Carolina State Archives and of a steering committee of archivists. Formation of a group such as this had been among the recommendations of the North Carolina Historical Records Advisory Committee at the conclusion of an NHPRC Needs Assessment Grant project in the state.¹³

The officers of the new society are a president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, and two members of the executive board. All but the secretary-treasurer serve one-year terms; the secretary-treasurer serves for two years. Candidates for office are announced by mail and elections are held at the annual business meeting. The society meets twice each year, once in the spring and once in the fall. The annual business meeting is a part of the fall meeting.¹⁴

The state of South Carolina, meanwhile, has followed a different course. At the fall meeting of the South Carolina Library Association (SCLA) in 1980, interested members formed the Archives and Special Collections Round Table (ASCR).¹⁵ Officers are a chairperson, vice-chairperson/chairperson-elect, and secretary. A regular meeting is scheduled in conjunction with the annual meeting of the SCLA, and SCLA members may join ASCR as one of their two round table choices included in basic memberships. Officers are elected at this regular meeting, and a newsletter, ASCR News, has been published since 1981.¹⁶ While no separate

archival organization yet exists in South Carolina, archivists in that state have found a forum for some of their activities through the statewide organization of a closely allied profession.

State archival organizations in the Southeast obviously share many similarities and many differences. Whatever the history, organizational structure, or the number of meetings and publications for each organization, a number of common aspects, themes, and questions can be examined. Among these are the use of newsletters to communicate with members, the definition of membership and the process of officer election, and the broad goals and objectives of the societies.

Five of the six archival organizations in the Southeast publish a newsletter. All newsletters carry news of and announcements from the particular archival organization publishing the newsletter, and many carry news of individual repositories and members, accessions, position announcements, and notes and articles of broad interest to readers. Newsletters also frequently include news and announcements national in scope, including reports on SAA meetings and on SAA section activities and announcements of SAA-sponsored activities and publications.

Recent issues of the Tennessee Archivists newsletter (summer 1983; winter 1984); of Access, the newsletter of the SALA (October 1980; May 1981); and of the SGA Newsletter (December 1983) have provided members with information about such national issues as the appointment of the Archivist of the United States, budget cuts under the Reagan administration as they affect historical and archival programs, and legislation proposing the independence of the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) from the General Services Administration (GSA). Tennessee and Georgia newsletters also quoted extensively from the comments of members of their respective congressional delegations made in response to letters from the archival organizations in those states concerning the separation of NARS from GSA.

Another identifiable trend in recent issues of southeastern archival newsletters is the increasing exchange of information among state archival organizations. Whether these items are brief notes, short calendar items, general notices, or longer articles, newsletter editors are more frequently looking beyond their own state borders and even beyond their own regions for news of interest to readers. The lengthy article "Disaster in Mississippi" (reprinted with the permission of author Franklin Walker, Jr., Hattiesburg City Archivist, and of H. T. Holmes, editor of The Primary Source, published by the Society of Mississippi Archivists in a recent issue of the SGA Newsletter (August 1983) exemplifies this effort to exchange information. While the particulars of the Mississippi flood would be of most interest to residents of that state, archivists in any setting can be more informed about archives-related events in other states and can learn from this tale of disaster and recovery.

Turning to the question of the definition of memberships for these archival organizations, the Society of Georgia Archivists's constitution states that "individual memberships shall be open to any person interested in the field of archives, manuscripts, special libraries, or a related discipline."¹⁷ A number of other societies define membership in a similarly broad way. The Articles of Incorporation of the Tennessee Archivists, on the other hand, recognizes two distinct and more tightly defined categories of membership:

There shall be two classes of membership--regular and associate. Regular members are those persons who are full-time employees or workers in an archives, manuscripts, or records management area; or who devote half their time to working with archives, manuscripts, or records management. Associate members are those interested persons in allied disciplines or those who do not qualify for regular memberships; they shall enjoy all the

privileges and benefits of membership except holding office and voting.¹⁸

While defining membership in a much more detailed way, the Tennessee Archivists nonetheless allows, through the definition of associate members, involvement in its organization by individuals representing a broad spectrum of archival and related activities and interests.

As with many voluntary or professional organizations, southeastern state archival organizations deliberately have not made membership restrictive, but rather have opened memberships as much as possible. This provides a larger pool of individuals from which to seek members and, whatever related organizations may exist in a state, encourages individuals in related professions or of related interests to participate in archival organizations.¹⁹

A more specific issue related to the trend towards defining membership broadly and towards attracting members from varied disciplines is the question of the method of selecting officers. Most organizations have nominating committees and announce nominees to all members by mail. Alabama, North Carolina, and Tennessee elect officers by voting at the annual business meeting, while Georgia and Florida conduct their elections by mail prior to the annual meeting.

Voting at the annual meeting might have two completely opposite results: it rewards those in attendance with the power to make the election decision, but at the same time, it prevents participation in the election process by those who, for whatever reason, are unable to attend the annual meeting. Voting by mail, on the other hand, offers an equal voice in elections to all members of the organization whether or not they can attend the annual meeting. Unanswered questions relative to voting by mail would be whether this actually has an effect on the attendance at the annual meeting and whether the number of returned ballots equals or exceeds the number of votes that might be expected to

be cast in person at the annual meeting.

A final broad question which must continually be faced by state archival organizations is that of their role as organizations for archivists. Some answers to this are hinted at in the various statements of purpose, goals, and objectives found in the constitutions of some state archival organizations. Encompassing the ideals of cooperation among the archivists and related groups and individuals, the Society of Florida Archivists offers this definition of its purpose:

The purpose of the Society of Florida Archivists is to promote cooperation and exchange of information among individuals and institutions interested in the preservation and use of archival and manuscript materials; to disseminate information on research materials and archival methodology; to provide a forum for the discussion of matters of common concern; and to cooperate with organizations and professions in related disciplines.²⁰

Other statements of purpose, goals, and objectives sound similar themes.

In practicality, what do these goals mean in the focus, operation, and programming of the organizations? Do these organizations look inward, concentrating on professional development for archivists? Do they look outward seeking to share some of the concepts of archival theory and work with experienced, inexperienced, volunteer, and part-time archivists as well as with non-archivists? Are these organizations a substitute or a supplement to membership or activity in the Society of American Archivists?

The relationships between local, state, and regional archival organizations and the SAA have been discussed and analyzed elsewhere in archival literature. Suffice it to say here that professional development and activity within a local, state, or regional group can indeed thrive without

automatically including or excluding professional involvement on the national level. While local, state, or regional groups may be the only arenas of involvement available to some participants for whatever reason, others participate fully in archival activity on more than one level at the same time.²¹

Programs from meetings of various state societies provide some insight into one way in which archival organizations strive to serve their members and others. These programs include a wide range of participants and subject matter. Speakers and panelists are drawn from among archivists, librarians, records managers, professors of history or English or political science, researchers, graduate students, administrators from government or from information agencies, and others. Sessions vary widely from workshops on such basic archival concepts and techniques as appraisal, arrangement and description, reference, conservation, and automation to more formal presentations of papers addressing such topics as education for the archival profession, historic preservation in urban settings, and the view of archival work held by society.

It would appear from a review of selected programs that at least some southeastern archival organizations are trying to look both inward and outward. Archival cooperation, archival development, and archival work seem to remain at the center of much of their activity, but they are trying to educate archivists and to provide for their continuing development. They are also trying to introduce non-archivists and new archivists to the archival profession and to furnish a local forum for the discussion of issues common to archivists and to others.

Planning and programming is never a simple matter, especially for any organization with a continuously evolving membership and with these members representing many varied levels of experience. Organizations must attract members and, then, must serve them and respond to their needs as

these members grow, yet these same organizations must also serve and be responsive to the needs of newer members and possibly also potential members. Operating harmoniously under circumstances which differ from state to state and serving diverse and constantly changing memberships are certainly major challenges facing archival organizations at this time of growth and change in the archival profession and in society as a whole. With six state archival organizations and two regional archival organizations at work in the Southeast, this region will most certainly continue to take a leading role in the training of and professional development for archivists, in the promotion of archival work, and in the ongoing growth of organizations responsive to the special situations in their own areas and to the needs of their many constituencies.

NOTES

¹Basic factual information about most local, state, and regional archival organizations in the United States may be found in the Society of American Archivists Committee on Regional Archival Activity, A Directory of Regional Archival Organizations, eds. Patrick M. Quinn and Kevin B. Leonard (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1983); and in Patrick M. Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists," The American Archivist 46 (Fall 1983): 433-440. Except where noted, information about officers, meetings, and publications is taken from these two sources.

²Lorraine Lee, Training Officer, Georgia Department of Archives and History, to the author, 14 December 1983.

³South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference,

programs for 1982 and 1983 annual meetings (photocopies).

⁴For a more detailed discussion of the interrelationships between specific regional and state archivists' groups, see Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations," pp. 434-35.

⁵Society of Georgia Archivists, Constitution and Bylaws, revised November 1981 (photocopy).

⁶According to Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations," p. 434, a "founding wave" swept the American archival community in 1972. Six archival organizations were founded in that year, and "other archival organizations have proliferated phenomenally since the early 1970s."

⁷Society of Alabama Archivists, Constitution and Bylaws (photocopy).

⁸Tennessee Archivists, Articles of Incorporation (photocopy).

⁹The Kentucky Archivist, Spring 1979, p. 1 (photocopy).

¹⁰Society of Florida Archivists, Constitution and Bylaws (photocopy).

¹¹SFA [Society of Florida Archivists] Newsletter, October 1983, p.1.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Society of North Carolina Archivists, news releases (photocopies).

¹⁴Society of North Carolina Archivists, Constitution and Bylaws (photocopy).

¹⁵ASCR [Archives and Special Collections Round Table of the South Carolina Library Association]

News, March 1981, p. 1 (photocopy).

¹⁶Archives and Special Collections Round Table Bylaws; reprinted in ASCR News, March 1981, p. 2-3 (photocopy).

¹⁷Society of Georgia Archivists, Constitution, revised 1981 (photocopy).

¹⁸Tennessee Archivists, Articles of Incorporation (photocopy).

¹⁹This discussion does not include a consideration of the "institutional member" category established by some organizations. This category of membership usually includes subscriptions to publications at a prescribed rate, but does not include voting or office-holding privileges, memberships for staff, or representation at meetings.

²⁰Society of Florida Archivists, Constitution (photocopy).

²¹Quinn, "Regional, Archival Organizations," pp. 437-38.