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Perspectives and Forecasts

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Perspectives and Forecasts

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PERSPECTIVES AND FORECASTS

Southern Archives: A Distinguished Past--A Bright Future

As the twenty-first century approaches it is accompanied by dramatic changes for the South. Southerners have been inundated with demographic, technological, and social developments which have exercised and will continue to effect dramatic changes in the traditional southern life-style. Once sleeping villages have become busy cities complete with shopping malls and burgeoning industry. All white public schools, businesses, and even churches have yielded to pressures for social equality and racial integration. An equable climate and multitudinous recreational and retirement opportunities have magnetized millions of Americans from the Northeast and Midwest, luring them to the Southland. All of these developments will, or at least should have far-reaching implications for southern archives and professional archivists for years to come.

As the last vestiges of a unique way of life disappear, southern archives will play an increasingly important role as they preserve the documentation of that life-style, making it available to the scholarly community and the general public. Significant records retained in many repositories will themselves reflect the evolving nature of the South as its distinctive character disappears and becomes supplanted by a sunbelt culture much more similar to the pluralism recognizable to a majority of Americans. Increased population should provide a larger tax base and/or greater charitable resources

for the development and improvement of archival facilities. A variety of new regional repositories have already made an impact through aggressive outreach programs and publicizing collecting policies. New and imaginative graduate programs in archival administration (not always identified by that name) will enable the South to remain at the forefront of professional education. Finally, the growth of newly organized regional professional organizations will provide the opportunity for continuing education among archivists and the kind of stimulating dialogue necessary to promote continued interest in professional growth.

Throughout the twentieth century the South has benefitted from the presence of fine archival institutions, both public and private as well as several world renowned manuscripts repositories. Due, in part, to the continuing efforts of the personnel of these institutions, both by the examples they have set in the development of and care for their collections and their aid in establishing other important regional institutions, archival institutions, and the profession will continue to grow and to play an increasingly significant role not only within the region but on the national scene as well.

Jerrold Lee Brooks
Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and
Reformed Churches

Is There Anything Unique About Archives/ Archivists in the Southeast?

As I sat and pondered this question, I recalled my first Society of American Archivists meeting held in Philadelphia in 1975. I arrived in Philadelphia with only the most basic training in archival techniques, little or no experience in the real world of archives, and almost no practical knowledge of the

problems of other archives and archivists.

At this early stage in my new career (I had been a librarian for the previous twenty years), I was somewhat intimidated to be amongst this austere and learned group of real archivists. I went to Philadelphia perfectly secure in the knowledge that my situation was unlike any other and that my archives and I were unique. Little did I know what surprises I would encounter during the course of that meeting!

As I attended various sessions that I felt might be of help in solving my many dilemmas, I realized that others had the same types of problems. How could this be? I was firmly convinced that no one else could have the same problems and situation that I had, but they did, and many other problems that I had not yet encountered. My paranoia began to subside as I realized that these archivists were from every region and represented every type of archival repository. I found new friends who understood and could discuss these problems in a meaningful and helpful way. Suggestions were made, solutions were offered, and I felt rescued from certain failure.

I returned home much encouraged by my newfound friends and colleagues that I could cope with this new career that was not governed by cataloging rules, established educational requirements, and accreditations as my former career had been. Provenance was the order of the day!

As I came to the realization that my archives and I were not unique, I also realized that none of the other archivists and the archives they represented were unique either. Only the records and manuscript collections in our archives are unique as we as individuals are unique.

Joyce Lamont
University of Alabama

Archives and Archivists in the Southeast

"All good families are very much alike," remarks a character in one of Rudyard Kipling's stories. The archives (and archivists) of the Southeast--meaning by that the tax-supported state archival institutions--all being good, are very much like good archives everywhere, devoted to good archival principles, practicing good archival techniques and procedures, and pursuing good archival goals. But each of these archives (and their archivists) are also unique, doing things in different ways and with different styles. After all, South Carolina is not Tennessee; Mississippi is not Florida; Alabama is neither Georgia nor North Carolina.

The thrust of the question is, however, whether these good southeastern state archives, considered together, display common characteristics which distinguish them from the good archives of other states. The answer is "Definitely yes"--especially if we add to the company listed above their fellow Confederate states, so willfully excluded from consideration by the editors of Provenance in this special issue.

No, I don't mean that we are different because we speak with southern accents or because we have a heritage of wonderful records for the black history. I mean we are still, deep in our bones (shades of William Lowndes Yancey!) passionate believers in states rights --which means we believe in the federal union and that the national government should be kept in its place and state boundaries and ways of doing things preserved.

We think of ourselves (and are thought of) as state agencies, vital components of state governments--essential to their functioning and well-being. Our primary responsibility, then, is for public records not private records--our basic loyalty is to the community to which all citizens belong, not to special groups, not even to historians, professional or amateur, although we count them as our friends.

This concentration of effort and attitude

probably lets us do a better job with government records than do the archival institutions of nonsouthern states--better even, perhaps, to make only one invidious comparison, than Wisconsin, which hardly knows whether it is a historical society, a government agency, or a cultural adjunct to a university. It also lets us neglect with easy conscience a variety of endeavors and activities which Wisconsin and similar institutions undertake, and we probably should, but don't.

In a nutshell, we stress government and neglect culture. They stress culture and neglect government.

Benedetto Croce said, "The past is inevitable; the future never is." Rather than predicting, one should strive to make the future what he wants it to be. As more and more human activity, including record-keeping, becomes present oriented, momentarily experienced and, after the instant replay, permanently forgotten, we archivists have to make herculean efforts to master the new technologies so that we make them history-preserving rather than history-destroying. Otherwise--maybe not twenty years from now, but not many years away--there will be no archivists, for there will be no records to preserve; and mankind will be trying to live without a usable past.

Charles E. Lee

South Carolina Department of Archives and History

A Southern Archive of Business

The Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University is a very promising endeavor. The common denominator of "Appalachia" gives a wide range to the subject areas of the collection. The South has too few such undertakings. There is the Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville; there are special collections in all the larger academic libraries which contain mixtures of

manuscripts, rare books, and some archival material. No southern university except the University of North Carolina, to my knowledge, has developed a real university archive. The National Archives and Records Service has a regional depository at East Point, Georgia, outside Atlanta, which slowly receives the records of government agencies in this region. But there is no concerted effort to collect the business and industrial records of the South.

Fortunately many towns and cities, not knowing what else to do, have turned their city records over to the local public library. Some counties have done the same. More of this needs to be done. But most public libraries were built with minimum square footage to begin with and no expectation of receiving anything as large as the city or county archives. Furthermore, most buildings are now at least twenty years old and can't hold the book collections much less the added burden of archives.

Some religious denominations have had southern archives for some time. The United Methodist Church has such a facility at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina; and the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches have a large archive at Montreat, North Carolina. The University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, has collected much material on the Episcopal Church in the South. The Baptist sects are hindered in such record gathering by their emphasis on local organization.

All of these archival undertakings are fine, and their number should increase. But we still need something similar to Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation at Greenville, Delaware, which began with the DuPont Company records and became the depository for many other large corporations. The great advantage which Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation has is that one large, reputable, and old company offers archival services to other companies. There is, without doubt, some distrust by industrial and commercial officers of the interpretation academic users might give to company records if they were opened to the public in an academic situation. This

fear is minimized when DuPont is the receiver.

The South ought to have such a depository because the history of southern industrial development in particular is different in many respects from that of the rest of the country. The relations of labor and management, labor and unions, industry and agriculture--these have had different histories in the South. The dependence from the beginning on outside capital is another difference. There are many more. All are legitimate reasons for saving corporate records for study and analysis. We need an archive for southern business.

Jesse C. Mills

Tennessee Valley Authority

Business Archives in the South

Any attempt to describe the current state of business archives in the region is tempered by the definitions applied to such collections. Both the quality and quantity of historical records preserved by southern business firms will vary widely, ranging from the single file drawer of newspaper clippings and ephemera to well-organized collections that provide useful insights to the corporation's unique characteristics. Similarly, the corporate perspective of the archival function and evaluation of services rendered to the business directly affect the level of support accorded to the archives. The uneven character of those collections termed archival by their parent bodies suggests the need for greater professional, educational efforts in this area, but the encouraging sign is that a number of firms have assumed responsibility for their own history and have taken some steps to preserve it.

Within the seven state archival region served by Provenance, the number of business archives has never been large, but it has remained relatively constant, comprising between 4 and 5 percent of all entries

compiled in national surveys. In the first edition of the Directory of Business Archives, published in 1975, eight firms reported the existence of an archival program,¹ while a recent, unpublished survey conducted by the Business Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists received only six responses.² The two compilations provided brief descriptions of the diverse holdings of three consumer products companies, two transportation firms, two banks, a trade association, religious organization, newspaper, mill, sorority and insurance company. In cumulative terms, Georgia claimed five entries; North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, two each; Alabama and Florida, one apiece.

The most distressing element in comparing the two surveys is the lack of continuity in business archives programs. Only the Coca-Cola Company listing appears in both directories. The seven institutions proudly claiming archival facilities in 1975 have either abandoned them or chosen not to publicize them to the broader archival community.³ While this type of extreme archival displacement is unusual in the business archives arena, it underscores the vulnerability of programs that do not contribute in measurable terms to the firm's business objectives.

On a more optimistic note, several of the firms listed in a new survey carefully investigated all of the ramifications of an archival program before committing corporate finances and staff support to it. With a fuller understanding of the archival mission within the corporate structure, management support for the function should be longer lasting. A number of other business enterprises are currently in the preliminary stages of analyzing their needs for historical documentation. The South will never be a major center for business archives programs, but some small growth in this discipline can be anticipated over the next decade as skilled archivists apply their craft in the business environment.

Philip F. Mooney
The Coca-Cola Company

NOTES

¹ Directory of Business Archives in the United States and Canada. Society of American Archivists. Business Archives Committee, 1975.

² Unpublished Business Archives Survey conducted by the Business Archives Section. Society of American Archivists. 1983. The research data is as developed through a telephone conversation with Claudette John, Archivist for the Insurance Company of North America and compiler of the data.

³ In the 1975 Directory, Blue Bird Body Company, Ft. Valley, Georgia; First National Bank of Atlanta; Union Planters Bank (Memphis); Eastern Air Lines (Miami); National Cotton Council of America (Memphis); News Observer and Raleigh Times; Spring Mills Inc. (South Carolina) and the Coca-Cola Company had listings.

In 1983 Womens' Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention (Birmingham); Georgia-Pacific Corporation (Atlanta); Alpha Delta Pi Sorority (Atlanta); R.J. Reynolds (Winston-Salem); Liberty Corporation (Greenville, SC) and the Coca-Cola Company were represented.

The Need for a Southern Regional Organization

The archival profession in the Southeast is at a pivotal point in its development. We have established in past decades many major and specialized archival institutions, and we have created in more recent times state archival associations and societies throughout the region. We must now take the next step--to organize a regionwide Southeast Archivists Society (SEAS).

The South has long appreciated its heritage and valued its records: Alabama's state archives was a pioneer establishment; the state archives of Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee have been leaders in the archival world for many years. Florida, Mississippi, and Kentucky, as well as Alabama, have put forth significant energy to create or revitalize their state archives. Additional institutions devoted to preserving records of labor, public and private leaders, places, phenomena, events, and groups throughout the South have proliferated, all staffed with professional archivists and manuscripts curators.

Add to that phenomenon the growth of archival associations in the South--from the trail-blazing efforts of the old tri-state (now the South Atlantic) Archives and Records Conference (SAARC) and the significant contributions of the Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA) to the younger but no less dedicated organizations in Alabama, the Carolinas, Tennessee, and elsewhere. The archival profession in the South has come into being in response to the needs of the society we serve; it has trained itself, renewed itself, and usually, acquired respect and appreciation for its knowledge, its dedication and its service. At this point, few areas of the Southeast have no professional organizations for archivists.

These statewide societies serve a valid and worthy purpose--that of creating a supportive infrastructure at a level capable of assisting in meaningful and real ways with archivists sharing common goals, problems and environs. The local associations have come into existence and have survived because they fill a real need, one to which the national organization is not designed to respond.

A regional organization, in the fullest sense of the word, would reflect the strengths of these state societies: the closeness, the shared problems, environs (both social and physical) and goals, and the community created by respected colleagues who are also friends. At the same time a regional

organization would possess characteristics of the national group: resources, expertise, size, and presence before the public and governmental bodies. Potential rewards are there in ample array, if we can organize a truly regional presence from Virginia to the turf staked out by the Society of Southwest Archivists and the Midwest Archives Conference. While individual southern archivists have possessed enormous stature, and while southern institutions and societies have garnered acclaim, there simply is no such thing as a southern spokesman to voice our shared concerns and offer our collective solutions and help. We are a cipher on the national professional scene and on the southern political scene. A state organization of twenty, fifty, or a hundred archivists is one thing; a regional organization of several hundred professionals is something else again.

Consider four obvious advantages: training, publication, preservation, and education. Training produces cross-fertilization not only between individuals and institutions, but also among states--states with different needs and resources, yet sharing a common heritage and environment. Resources of expertise, of approach, of problems faced and solved (or unsolved) would expand enormously; this strength of the SAARC could be greatly increased as the new organization comes into existence.

In publication, a real opportunity exists for a valuable and significant program to augment the Society of American Archivists. The SGA's Provenance could very well be a flagship of such a program, with an expanded newsletter and instructional series program to accompany it. Not only letterpress, but microform and video could be produced.

As to preservation, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that a Southeast documentation conservation center could be established, with support funds being channeled from several institutions through SEAS. The object, of course, would be a self-sufficient operation doing work for

SEAS members at a cost plus level and also accepting preservation work from other institutions and individuals.

In the area of education, the regional group could become a powerful voice for the preservation of records and the proper role of archivists and manuscript curators, educating public officials at all levels (budget officers, chief executive officers, appropriations committees and law-making bodies). This includes the public at large, from school children to businessmen to besieged taxpayers, about the contributions of archivists and the advantages of professional care of records. It could provide a ready source of expert consultation and advice to any southern entity requesting it.

There are several organizational models that could be examined for suitability; there will certainly be divergent opinions over proper goals and activities of such a regional group. A lot of time, energy, and thought will be needed before this envisioned regional society will achieve reality. Hard questions about the already existing societies and the SAARC vis-a-vis their relationship with the new group need to be asked and answered. Funding, conferences, membership, location--all will require good faith, good effort, a deep sense of cooperation and enlightened self-interest.

But the basic question "Should There Be a Southeast Archivists Society?" should not be a point of concern. Every month without such an organization to speak for all of us is a month we can ill afford to let slip.

Gayle Peters
Federal Archives and Records Center
East Point, Georgia

The Archival Profession in the Southeast

Since the southeastern states have been in the

forefront in developing state archives, manuscript repositories, and leaders in the archival profession, the area is unique in those respects as compared to some other sections of the United States. It was in the Southeast that the archival profession was born thirty-three years before the National Archives was established in 1934. Largely through the efforts of Thomas McAdory Owen, Alabama established the first state archives in 1901 under the name of Department of Archives and History. Similar crusading by Dunbar Rowland of Mississippi led to that state following Alabama's example the next year by establishing an archival agency with the same name, and with Rowland as its director. In 1903 the North Carolina Historical Commission (presently the Division of Archives and History) was created. Historian Robert D.W. Connor was appointed its director but with the title of secretary. His success in administering that agency for eighteen years, his understanding of the historical importance of archives, and his reputation as a historian led to his appointment as the first archivist of the United States in 1934. One of the founders and the first president of the Society of American Archivists was Albert Ray Newsome, professor of history at the University of North Carolina.

Among the most noted and early developers of major manuscript repositories in university libraries were Professors J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton of the University of North Carolina and William Kenneth Boyd of Duke University. As chairman of their respective history departments, they also became extraordinary collectors of historical materials. Both had been trained in German historical methodology which required that graduate theses be based on research in original sources. Another such historian was Robert Lee Meriwether, founder and long-time director of the famed South Caroliniana Library. Without the untiring labors of another South Carolinian, Archivist Charles E. Lee, support for the preservation of historical records might never have been added to the responsibilities of the former

National Historical Publications Commission, since 1975 the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

The continuing development of manuscript collections and university and college archives are the best indication that, increasingly, academicians are recognizing the importance of preserving our documentary heritage, but unfortunately, legislators and budget officials are not yet showing the same kind of recognition when it comes to providing financial support for such preservation. Perhaps there is not an archives or manuscript department in the Southeast that has anything approaching adequate funding and staffing. The public in general is also slowly becoming more aware of the significance of historical records. This may be due more to the aging of the population and its consequent interest in family history and genealogy and the rising level of the public's education than to the publicity coming from historical records repositories. That publicity needs to be increased, but so do the processing, describing, and conservation of records. The ongoing expansion and upgrading of archival education and training in the Southeast as well as elsewhere in the country give encouragement that those activities will be increased and improved, but inadequate budgets for staffing, equipment, supplies, and expanded storage will no doubt be ever thus.

Individual state archival organizations as well as the South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference provide the avenues through which increased awareness of the importance of historical records can continue to be made. If the whole preservation movement in the country does not decline within the next twenty years, and given the strides that are being made by the archival profession, even with budgetary restraints, there should be continual advancement throughout the Southeast in preserving our documentary heritage.

Mattie U. Russell
Duke University

Archives in the Southeast

When I was asked to write a brief essay on the questions: "Is there anything unique about archives and archivists in the Southeast?" and "Where are we going in the next twenty years?", I was tempted to take the easy way out and write my shortest essay ever: "Not really, and I don't really know!" However, upon reflection I decided that such flippancy, while gratifyingly easy, was too simplistic.

In many respects archivists nationwide are similar. We are all in a profession that lacks widespread public attention. We are all very dedicated to our craft. And we all take budgets that won't buy spare parts for the front wheel of a jet fighter and do miraculous things.

While there are things about archivists in the Southeast that are unique, explaining them is difficult. The best way I know is to point to our only regional archives "organization," the South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference, or SAARC. I use the term organization loosely because SAARC has no president, no officers, no board of directors, and no publications. Without this structure, it has managed to have an annual meeting for each of the past seventeen years, and the programs that rival any Society of American Archivists annual meeting I've ever attended. That such an entity can continue to flourish in these times when organizing seems to be an obsession, says something for archives and archivists in our region of the country. In spite of the fact that the number of archives professionals in the South has almost doubled in the last ten years, we have managed to keep our informality and still maintain a free information exchange.

The nature of archives in the Southeast is also somewhat different from that of the rest of the country. While some of our southern states are among

the oldest in the nation, they are also among the fastest growing. The rush to the sunbelt has put southern archives in the position of having to care for some of the oldest records in the country while trying desperately to gain control of the overwhelming volume of current information being generated by big governments. Florida, on the other hand, has a history going back to the mid-1500s, but very little recorded evidence of that period remains in the state today. The preponderance of the Florida state archives' major records holdings are less than twenty-five years old.

This phenomenon of historical records holdings becoming more and more current leads me to the second question; "Where are we going in the next twenty years?" Twenty years ago none of us would have imagined the geometric expansion of information and resultant technological records keeping innovations that we have currently seen. And this expansion will continue. We have moved into an information oriented society in which the role of the archivist as information scientist is going to become more and more crucial. While this change will increase our workload considerably, it may also prove to be our salvation. We can no longer be considered by the general populace as mere collectors of interesting old documents, but as a vital link in the information chain. I feel this recognition will translate into increased funding potential for our programs and facilities. While this trend is inevitable, it is up to us as archivists to become more aggressive in establishing our place in this new information society.

Edward J. Tribble
Florida Department of State
Division of Archives, History, and Records Management

Some Thoughts on Archival Trends in the Southeast

Traditionally the holdings of southeastern repositories have been regional in nature. During the next twenty years this characteristic will not disappear; however, changes in demographics and in areas of research interest should result in archival collections which have national significance while continuing to reflect the history of the region. In appraising and collecting documents, archivists should consider several trends in historical research which have special relevance for the Southeast.

The study of social history continues to grow, particularly in the examination of groups such as blacks, women, and the poor which for the most part have not held power in the past. Efforts to document the history of minority and underprivileged groups in the Southeast have intensified substantially during the past twenty years, but much work remains to be done. Additionally, recent immigration, such as the enormous increase in the number of Latin Americans moving into the Gulf region, has had a dramatic impact on the region and should spur research interest. Differences in language and culture should present special challenges to the archivist attempting to document these groups.

As the metropolitan areas of the Southeast grow in size and number, the study of urban history should have increased relevance. Population shifts from the Northeast and Midwest to the Sunbelt, combined with immigration and the movement of people from rural areas to the cities, promise to alter substantially the distribution of people in the Southeast and to result in new urban areas. The development of cities in the Southeast should be the focus of much study.

A related area is the growth of business and industry in the Southeast, which should present new opportunities for research in business history. As recent business records are accessioned, the archivist most likely will encounter a high percentage of records produced by computer. In order to handle these records the archivist might have to add computer literacy to the multilingual skills needed to document social history.

One final trend in historical research is the study of the World War II period, which is rapidly increasing in interest to a wide audience. While papers pertaining to the Civil War, a time of traditional southern fascination, have become scarce and difficult to collect, a wealth of documents concerning the home front and the battlefields of World War II are available but have not been collected. Many individuals with significant memories of the period could make good participants in an oral history program, but efforts to capture their recollections should not be delayed. Of additional significance is the fact that a high percentage of the officer corps of the armed services during the war came from the Southeast.

Anne S. Wells
Mississippi State University