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“The Mississippi Plan”: Dunbar Rowland and the Creation of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Lisa Speer and Heather Mitchell

The establishment of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) was a cultural milestone for a state that some regarded as backward in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Alabama and Mississippi emerged as pioneers in the founding of state archives in 1901 and 1902 respectively, representing a growing awareness of the importance of preserving historical records. American historians trained in Germany had recently introduced the United States to the application of scientific method to history. The method involved careful inspection of primary documents and writings to produce objective answers to large historical questions.¹

The challenges involved in ferreting out primary documents, however, often frustrated the research efforts of historians. Some states, like Massachusetts, had well-established historical societies that functioned as primary source repositories. In other states individuals held historical records in private libraries, and public records were scattered among the

¹ Peter Novick, *The Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-40.

many creating agencies.² In the 1880s the American Historical Association (AHA) sponsored the first organized national efforts aimed at surveying state records and advocating for their preservation. In 1895 the AHA formed the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), charged with collecting information about privately held historical documents. The commission eventually published the first guide to American archives.³ In 1899 yet another commission devoted to surveying archival holdings grew out of the AHA. The Public Archives Commission's (PAC) work paralleled that of the HMC, but instead confined itself to public repositories.⁴ The PAC published its findings of state records up through 1917. Additionally, the work of the PAC led to archival reform in the United States, contributing to the professionalization of archives and the establishment of standardized practices through the work of the Annual Conference of Archivists.⁵

While these commissions functioned, changing social and economic conditions in the South created fertile ground for the growth of public archives. In the 1890s Mississippi experienced an economic and educational revitalization that sparked an interest in preserving and promoting the "Southern identity," including its historical records, particularly those relating to the recent Civil War.⁶ Although the Records and Pension Division of the War Department held both Union and Confederate war records, southerners were denied access to them for a number of years after the Civil War. This triggered wide-

² Lucile M. Kane, "Manuscript Collecting," in *In Support of Clio: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar*, ed. William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil, 29-48 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958).

³ Robert R. Simpson, "The Origin of the State Departments of Archives and History in the South" (PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 1971), 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

⁵ G. Philip Bauer, "Public Archives in the United States," in *In Support of Clio*, 49-76.

⁶ Robert R. Simpson, "The Origin of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History," *Journal of Mississippi History* 35, no. 1 (February 1973): 1.

spread concern among learned circles in the South that unless they collected and published their own material, the “Southern” interpretation of the war would be silenced. Taking a proactive role in the preservation of these important records would ensure that scholarship reflected the South’s position on such complex and contested issues as slavery and secession.⁷ Coupled with this concern, a growing regional and cultural awareness prompted Mississippians to establish a historical society and later a separate department of archives and history, dedicated to the preservation and publication of the state’s historical records.

Like Alabama’s state archives, the MDAH emerged out of the state historical society. Originally established in 1890, the Mississippi Historical Society (MHS) ceased to function for a few years until Franklin L. Riley, professor of history and rhetoric at the University of Mississippi, revived the organization. Professor Riley accepted the position of secretary-treasurer of the moribund MHS in 1897. His plan to reinvigorate the organization involved opening meetings to the general public and issuing a yearly publication of the papers presented at these meetings. He developed a professional relationship with Thomas M. Owen, who held a corresponding role in the Alabama Historical Society. The two men began a rapid exchange of letters, as well as their respective societies’ circulars and publications, that proved beneficial to Riley. Not only did Owen serve as Riley’s mentor, but Owen’s work in Alabama provided Riley with a model for Mississippi. Owen successfully drafted legislation that resulted in the creation of the Alabama Historical Commission to study the condition of official state records. In Mississippi, Riley followed suit.

Governor Andrew H. Longino signed Riley’s legislation into law, establishing the Mississippi Historical Commission (MHC) on March 2, 1899. The Mississippi legislature also provided for an annual \$1,000 stipend for the commission’s publishing activities, a far more generous sum than the \$250 sti-

⁷ Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 72.

pend that the Alabama commission received.⁸ Perhaps the Mississippi legislature's generosity resulted from Riley's warning that if Mississippians did not take the lead in publishing the state's history, they would have to be satisfied with the interpretations of outsiders. A student of the scientific method of history who benefited from studying under Professor Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins University, Riley supported the premise that state and local history provided the bedrock for writing national history. In order to write history, one needed primary documents—documents that one should be able to find at the state's historical repository. If Mississippi wanted to take part in the national exchange of history, Riley admonished, "the task at hand must be conducted without delay."⁹

The MHC was a five-member board, chaired by Riley and charged with "the extensive investigation . . . of Mississippi's historical work."¹⁰ Historical Society President Stephen D. Lee predicted that the work of the commission signaled the beginning of a great southern historical renaissance.¹¹ After five months of investigative work, the commission released its report on the condition of historical records in Mississippi. The results were alarming. Many important records had been lost, destroyed, or outright taken by historical agencies from other states, including the papers of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. The 294-page report recommended that Mississippi follow the lead of Alabama and create a state department of archives and history charged with acquiring, arranging, and preserving the historical records that still remained in the state, as well as those created in the future. If the state failed to do so, the report ominously predicted, Mississippians would "be forced

⁸ "Development of Historical Work in Mississippi," *Publications of the Southern History Association* (Washington, DC: Southern History Association, 1902), 339.

⁹ Simpson, "Origin of the Mississippi Department," 5-6. Riley was a former student of Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins University, one of the major proponents of scientific history in American academic circles.

¹⁰ Simpson, "Origin of the State Departments," 135.

¹¹ "Report of the Mississippi Historical Commission," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* 5 (1914): 13.

to the inconvenience, as well as the humiliation[,] of going elsewhere to learn about the doings of their ancestors."¹² Legislation, again drafted by Riley, creating the MDAH passed after a few revisions. On February 26, 1902, Governor Longino signed two separate bills into law, providing for the creation and the financial support of the agency.¹³

By 1902 Riley had grown weary of university politics and for a time contemplated applying for the directorship of the new state archives. For reasons unknown, however, he decided against leaving academic life. The three original candidates for the position were all members of the MHS: Charles H. Brough, a professor of history at Mississippi College; Dunbar Rowland, an attorney and amateur historian from Coffeetown; and W. F. Hamilton of Carrollton, who later withdrew from the running. By a narrow one-vote margin (5-4), the executive board of the MHS elected Rowland.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the minutes of the society fail to record how individual board members voted or what their opinions of the candidates were. In light of Brough's professional qualifications, Rowland's appointment remains an intriguing mystery.

Brough clearly was the strongest candidate for the position. Like Riley, Brough had studied under Professor Adams who trained him as a historian. After years of teaching political economics at his alma mater, Mississippi College, Brough left to pursue a degree in law. He received the degree in 1902 from the University of Mississippi. After his defeat, Brough returned to teaching at Hillman College in Jackson for a brief period. His desire for a position of greater leadership eventually led him to the University of Arkansas, where he served as chair of political economy, and later to the state capitol, when he was elected governor. Brough's biographer, Foy Lisenby, speculates

¹² Simpson, "Origin of the State Departments," 136.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴ The Executive Board consisted of General Stephen D. Lee, Bishop Charles B. Galloway, Dr. Franklin Riley, University of Mississippi Chancellor R. B. Fulton, Dr. Edward Mayes, Dr. R. W. Jones, Hon. J. R. Preston, Professor J. M. White, and Professor G. H. Brunson.

that lingering disappointment over the MDAH position factored into Brough's relocation from Mississippi to Arkansas.¹⁵

Dunbar Rowland was thirty-eight years old when he assumed the directorship of the MDAH. A native of Oakland, Mississippi, and the youngest of the four sons of Dr. W. B. and Mary J. Bryan Rowland, he had attended private schools in Memphis, Tennessee, and Oakland as a boy. He graduated with honors from Mississippi A & M (now Mississippi State University) with a BS degree in 1886 and from the University of Mississippi with his LLB degree two years later. Rowland practiced law in Memphis for four years after graduation, but returned to Yalobusha County, which had been home to such prominent attorneys and statesmen as L. Q. C. Lamar, General E. C. Walthall, and Dr. Edward Mayes.¹⁶

If Franklin Riley had decided to pursue the directorship of the MDAH, Rowland might have faded into obscurity as a small-town Mississippi attorney instead of gaining renown as the first director of the Mississippi state archives. Initially the state appointed Rowland to the position for a term of six years, but in 1907 and then again in 1913, the state reappointed Rowland to the directorship. He ultimately served in this position for thirty-five years, until his death from a chronic throat ailment in November 1937.¹⁷

The MDAH consisted of five divisions: archives, library, historic sites, museum, and publications.¹⁸ The historical society continued to function in its established capacity of publishing scholarly papers based on original research. Under the "Mis-

¹⁵ Foy Lisenby, *Charles Hillman Brough: A Biography* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 15.

¹⁶ In 1906 the University of Mississippi conferred upon Rowland an honorary doctorate of law. Manuscript, "Dr. Dunbar Rowland," n.d., Dunbar Rowland—Biographical Sketches Subject File, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as MDAH), Jackson.

¹⁷ Robert Linder, "Dunbar Rowland: 1864-1937," in *Lives of Mississippi Authors*, ed. James B. Lloyd, 396 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981).

¹⁸ Ernest Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 160.

Mississippi Plan,” a term used by Rowland in his 1905 address before the Tennessee General Assembly and the Historical Society, the archives and historical society functioned as two separate, state-supported entities—one devoted to collecting, classifying, and preserving historical materials, and the other engaged in publishing the results of the research.¹⁹ Other southern states, like Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Texas, eventually adopted the “Mississippi Plan.” Within a decade of the MDAH’s establishment, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina also established separate state departments of archives and history.²⁰

The Mississippi archives’ eleven-point charge, outlining the director’s responsibilities, included such basic duties as “the care and custody of the official archives” and “the collection and preservation of Mississippi material bearing upon the history of the state from the earliest times.”²¹ Additionally, the charge included encouraging historical work, arranging valuable primary material of an unofficial nature, compiling and publishing an official and statistical register for the state, and collecting historical material of a printed nature concerning Mississippi for the state library.

When Rowland assumed the directorship, the most pressing duties included securing quarters for the new agency and reporting on the condition of the state’s historical records. In these duties, he faced some significant challenges, the first being lack of space. The records had been moved many times previously, but in 1902 they were stored in the Old Capitol Building, where Rowland found them spilling “from the old library

¹⁹ Dunbar Rowland, *The Mississippi Plan for the Preservation of the State Archives, an Address Delivered by Invitation, before the General Assembly of Tennessee, and the Tennessee Historical Society, January 10, 1905* (Nashville: Brandon, 1905), 12; *Third Annual Report of the Director of the Archives and History of the State of Mississippi from October 1, 1903 to October 1, 1904* (Nashville: Brandon, 1905), 21.

²⁰ *Second Annual Report of the Director of the Archives and History of the State of Mississippi from October 1, 1902 to October 1, 1903* (Nashville: Brandon, 1903), 8; and Posner, *American State Archives*, 21. Some states, like Minnesota and Wisconsin, established and adhered to a different model in which the state historical societies also functioned as the state records repositories.

²¹ Rowland, *The Mississippi Plan*, 8-9.

room on the third floor . . . into the hallways of the building itself.”²² In 1903 the MDAH moved into quarters in the new capitol building, where it remained until 1940, when it relocated again to the War Memorial Building next door to the Old Capitol.²³

The condition of the records also complicated Rowland’s work. The majority of records were damaged and many were missing. In his *Third Annual Report*, Rowland observed that “the confusion existing is . . . appalling. There are countless documents of all kinds, conditions and dates mixed together in the most mystifying manner. . . . In boxing the records there seems to have been no attempt at classification or arrangement. The records of the territorial period are often mixed with those of fifty years later.”²⁴ In his 1905 speech before the Tennessee Historical Society, Rowland relived his “discovery” of the condition in which he found the archives, telling the group:

The third floor of the old capitol building was used as a kind of dumping place for all the flotsam and getsam [sic], which always accumulate about a public building. . . . The historical records of the State, being classed with “old things” were banished to the garret. Official documents of all kinds, from all departments, were thrown together in hopeless confusion, and in this neglected condition they were generally regarded as so much waste paper.²⁵

²² “Yalobusha Historical Society, Inc. Meets June 17th,” *The Coffeeville [MS] Courier*, June 24, 1999.

²³ Charlotte Capers and R. A. McLemore, “The Archives and History Building, 1971,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 33, no 2 (1971): 1. The MDAH relocated again in 1971 to a building on the south side of the Old Capitol and in October 2003 moved into a new facility at 200 North Street in downtown Jackson.

²⁴ *Third Annual Report*, 23.

²⁵ Rowland, *The Mississippi Plan*, 9.

In particular, the fragile condition of the Confederate war records forced Rowland to request an additional appropriation for rebinding and recopying.²⁶ He faced a daunting task in creating order out of chaos.

Despite the lack of space and abysmal state of the records, Rowland began to make progress towards putting the Mississippi archives in order. He arranged state records in series according to the originating office, applying the archival theory of provenance; and within those series, documents were “arranged just as if they had been carefully and systematically arranged from the beginning,” now referred to as original order.²⁷ Archivists erred, Rowland contended, in attempting to impose library classification schemes on archival materials. He advocated for a simple chronological arrangement over alphabetical or subject categorization. “The object to be attained in the arrangement of all government archives,” he wrote in 1910, “is to classify [manuscripts] in such a manner that the documents will tell the story, in an historical way, of the progress and development of the state and its people from the beginning.”²⁸

While Rowland followed well established archival theory in arranging the state’s archives, he was in the vanguard of archivists in the United States calling for the adoption of national standards and procedures for maintaining archives. He presented his thoughts in 1912 at the landmark Fourth Annual Conference of Archivists. Rowland, along with archivists and historians Waldo Leland and Victor Hugo Paltsits, offered the “first systematic suggestions for scientific archival practice” in

²⁶ *Second Annual Report*, 45.

²⁷ *Eleventh and Twelfth Annual Reports of the Director of Archives and History of the State of Mississippi, 1912-1913* (Nashville: Brandon-Craig-Dickerson, 1914), 12; and Posner, *American State Archives*, 163.

²⁸ *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1914), 270.

the United States.²⁹ In his address, Rowland suggested three broad categories for classification of state records: provincial, territorial, and state. Under each period, records were grouped by administration and department and arranged chronologically within each class. He also advocated the binding and indexing of all records worth preserving, a concept he credited to Worthington C. Ford, head of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, under whom Rowland studied in 1902-1903.³⁰

Rowland had spoken of his work in the archival field at the International Congress of Archivists and Librarians in Brussels, Belgium, in August 1910, where he advocated for the use of a standardized international classification scheme. Rowland had previously visited archives in Belgium, Germany, England, and Holland; and he found European archivists divided over basic issues like preservation, classification, access, and professional qualifications for archivists. He hoped that American archivists would take the lead in developing a uniform system of classification.³¹

Rowland devoted much of his time to acquiring, preserving, and cataloging Mississippi's historical records. Shortly after the establishment of the department, Rowland obtained a large collection of Confederate military records hidden since the Civil War in a Masonic building in Jackson.³² He acquired territorial records dating from 1798 to 1817 and executive, legislative, and judicial records of the state, beginning with the first year of statehood. Additionally, he uncovered the journal

²⁹ Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 13; and Victor Hugo Paltsits, "An Historical Resume of the Public Archives Commission from 1899 to 1921," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1922* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1926), 156.

³⁰ Dunbar Rowland, "The Adaptation of Archives to Public Use," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1914), 269.

³¹ Dunbar Rowland, "The Concentration of State and National Archives," *Annual Report of the American Historical Society for the Year 1910* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1912), 298.

³² *First Annual Report*, 63-66.

of Mississippi's first governor, Winthrop Sargent, and an original manuscript of laws which Sargent and other territorial judges established.³³

His search for primary source materials also took him abroad. Between 1699 and 1798, France, England, and Spain, respectively, ruled the area that later comprised the territory and eventually the state of Mississippi. In 1906 Mississippi's legislature generously provided Rowland with a \$1,000 appropriation to travel abroad to secure transcripts of important documents from these early provincial years. In the process, he acquired close to 7,000 transcribed documents for the state archives and proceeded to have them bound and published as the first three volumes of the *Mississippi Provincial Archives*.³⁴

The same year that Rowland visited Europe, he also traveled to Cuba. When Spain ceded East and West Florida to the United States, the archives of Louisiana and Florida were relocated to Havana in 1819 and housed in the Archivo Nacional. In 1888 and 1889 the archives of Cuba moved again, this time to Spain, but the collection of Mississippi materials remained in Cuba. In December 1906 and January 1907 Rowland visited the Archivo Nacional in order to acquire transcriptions of these materials for the MDAH.³⁵ In these collecting efforts, Rowland followed in the footsteps of historians of earlier centuries. Driven by the paucity of sources available for their research, these historians-turned-collectors amassed historic manuscripts that became the cornerstones of major American research libraries.³⁶

Rowland felt a strong sense of duty to collect records relating to Mississippi's early history, but his real interest lay in

³³ Posner, *American State Archives*, 163; *First Annual Report*, 63-64. The report also provides a more complete list of archival records obtained by the department.

³⁴ Charles A. Weeks, "Voices from Mississippi's Past: Spanish Provincial Records in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History," *Journal of Mississippi History* 61, no. 2 (1999): 153, 8n.

³⁵ *Sixth Annual Report of the Director of Archives and History of the State of Mississippi from October 1, 1906 to October 1, 1907* (Nashville: Brandon, 1908), 7-8.

³⁶ Kane, *In Support of Clio*, 7.

collecting and publishing materials related to the state's Confederate soldiers. In his second annual report, Rowland wrote: "If there is one duty of this Department which should stand before all others it is that sacred duty to preserve the record of the deeds of the Confederate soldiers of Mississippi who gave up everything for country and made forever heroic the time in which they lived."³⁷ Rowland proved quite successful in the mission of preserving Confederate records. When the *Second Annual Report of the Director* was compiled, it boasted a collection of over 800 Civil War rosters of Mississippi companies.

The state granted Rowland a leave of absence early in his tenure to travel to Washington, DC, for the express purpose of soliciting aid for the publication of a roster of Confederate officers and enlisted men. Rowland met with numerous government officials, including Major General Fred Crayton Ainsworth, chief of the Records and Pension Division of the War Department. Ainsworth proposed to Rowland that he expand his project to include all of the states that had engaged in the Civil War. The project, Ainsworth suggested, "should be a record of the valor and heroism of the American soldier regardless of state or section." In 1903 the expanded proposal passed both houses of the United States Congress.³⁸ The MDAH enthusiastically embraced its obligation to contribute rosters to the project. The archives cooperated with the United Confederate Veterans and the Confederate History Commission to solicit information on the service records of individual soldiers. Ultimately, Mississippi contributed more rosters to the project than any other southern state.³⁹ Rowland also used his time in the nation's capitol to study the organization and practices at the Library of Congress and the Carnegie Institution in order to improve his operations at the Mississippi archives.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Second Annual Report*, 9.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁹ Sally Leigh McWhite, "Echoes of the Lost Cause: Civil War Reverberations in Mississippi from 1865 to 2003" (PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 2003), 119; *Fourth Annual Report of the Director of the Department of Archives and History of the State of Mississippi, from October 1, 1904 to October 1, 1905* (Jackson: MDAH, 1905), 10.

⁴⁰ *Fourth Annual Report*, 11.

Rowland's many travels in conjunction with the roster and transcription projects resulted in frequent absences from the MDAH in the early years of his tenure. During these periods, the daily administration of the archives fell to his assistant, Eron Opha Gregory. Gregory was Rowland's first cousin and had served as his assistant from the inception of the department. In December 1906 she and Rowland were married. Eron Rowland was an important force in the development of the new archives, providing the director with the freedom to travel while leaving the agency in her capable hands. While Eron's early letters to Rowland indicate that she found the daily administration of the archives stressful, she applied for the position of director after Rowland's death in 1937.⁴¹ Thirty-two years of assisting the director obviously had instilled in her the confidence she needed to feel qualified for the position. Though she did not receive the appointment, she served as acting director until the state appointed William D. McCain in January 1938. Dr. McCain's academic credentials and professional experience undoubtedly factored into his appointment as state archivist. He held a PhD from Duke University and for a brief period served as assistant archivist at the National Archives.⁴² Eron Rowland played a vital role in the development of the Mississippi Hall of Fame, which contained portraits of distinguished Mississippians. The Rowlands encouraged the citizens of the state to nominate Mississippians for the Hall, as well as to donate portraits of them to adorn the walls. Through these efforts, they hoped to foster an "active historical spirit"⁴³ among the general public and a lasting interest in the activities of the MDAH. Dunbar Rowland assigned this Hall a majestic purpose, stating: "The noble . . . new Capitol of Mississippi, with its Hall of Fame, should be the Parthenon, the Louvre . . . to all

⁴¹ Correspondence between Eron O. Gregory Rowland and Dunbar Rowland, Eron O. Rowland Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi, Oxford.

⁴² *Biennial Report of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, July 1, 1937-June 30, 1939* (Jackson: MDAH, 1939), 7.

⁴³ *Fourth Annual Report*, 32.

people of this great state,"⁴⁴ and he expected it to inspire pride in the achievements of Mississippians.

Eron Rowland also actively wrote and published scholarly materials on Mississippi and the South. The author of numerous books and monographs on the history of the lower South, she was awarded an honorary doctor of letters degree by the University of the South in Suwanee, Tennessee, in 1933.⁴⁵ Scholarship on the South was a common interest of both Rowlands. In fact, after 1912 Dunbar Rowland shifted his focus from developing the archives to research and publishing. His decreasing interest in developing the archives may have resulted from a disagreement with the legislature, constantly dealing with cramped departmental quarters, a lack of fiscal support from the state, and his inadequate salary.⁴⁶ He continued in the capacity of director of the MDAH for another twenty-five years, but an increasing emphasis on scholarly activity and archival developments on the national level marked this period of his life, and not the archives' immediate collections. Remembering Rowland years following his death, one Mississippian reflected that while he might have devoted more funds to archival work, instead he "developed a tradition of publication that put Mississippi history in black and white."⁴⁷

As with his archival collecting activities, Dunbar Rowland's scholarship focused on Mississippi and Confederate history. Rowland once remarked: "Thousands of . . . great

⁴⁴ *First Annual Report*, 82.

⁴⁵ "Dunbar Rowland—Death," Subject File, MDAH, Jackson; Eron Rowland's publications include: *Marking the Natchez Trace* (1910); *Mississippi's Colonial Population and Land Grants* (1916); *The Dona Isabella, wife of Hernando De Sota* (1920); *Mississippi Territory in the War of 1812* (1921); *History of Hinds County, Mississippi, 1821-1922* (1922); *Peter Chester, Third Governor of the Province of British West Florida under British Dominion, 1770-1781* (1925); *Andrew Jackson's campaign against the British, or The Mississippi Territory in the War of 1812 . . .* (1926); *Varina Howell, wife of Jefferson Davis*, 2 vols. (1927, 1931); and *Life, Letters and Papers of William Dunbar* (1930).

⁴⁶ McCain, "History and Program of the Mississippi State Department of Archives and History," *American Archivist* 13 (January 1950): 29.

⁴⁷ Frank Smith, "Rowland Put State Archives Back in Order," *Jackson Daily News*, April 10, 1988.

names are found on the pages of Southern history. . . . Who will write their history is not so much the question, as who will write it correctly."⁴⁸ His concern for the written history of the South weighed heavily on his philosophy of history and his scholarship. Although not a trained historian, Rowland shared with those trained in the scientific method an appreciation for the importance of studying original documents. Yet in significant ways, he diverged from this school of thought. "Scientifically trained" historians advocated the use of primary sources to *objectively* answer broad historical questions. They sought to move away from genealogical studies and narrative histories on obscure topics, characterized by bias and sentiment. Dunbar Rowland's scholarship falls short on objectivity, particularly his writings on Confederate history. He wrote within the narrative vein, not analytical. In addition, he focused on topics of limited scope, usually some aspect of Mississippi history, leaving little doubt as to his pro-Southern bias.

In his study of history, Dunbar Rowland followed in the path advocated by his hero, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America. In 1882 Davis urged members of the Southern Historical Society to faithfully memorialize in writing the "just" Confederate cause and the "worthy" men who fought the war.⁴⁹ Such was the brand of history favored by Rowland, one that was wholly incompatible with the objectives of scientific history. Rowland's conviction that historians had failed to accurately tell the history of the South fueled his enthusiasm for the Confederate roster project, and particularly for his compilation of the Jefferson Davis papers, published as a ten-volume set.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rowland, *The Mississippi Plan*, 6-7.

⁴⁹ Jefferson Davis, "Address of President Davis," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 10 (1882): 228-29.

⁵⁰ As with her husband's writing, a Southern bias influenced Eron Rowland's approach to the subjects of her historical research and writing. As one of the first women historians in Mississippi, she is significant for taking up the study of neglected topics and for her preservation activities involving the Natchez Trace and the Old Capitol in Jackson. See: Marlo Ann Alt Hendrix, "Preserving Mississippi: The Life and Work of Eron Opha Moore Rowland" (master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 2002).

When he undertook his study of Davis in 1921, Rowland wrote to several trained historians for their advice, and the feedback he received was not encouraging. As Grady McWhiney relates in his article, "Historians as Southerners," those who bothered to respond to Rowland cited his lack of objectivity on the subject. Charles M. Andrews, a professor at Yale University, responded in a letter: "I believe that one who has made up his mind on so important a point [as the greatness of Jefferson Davis] and has got his estimates determined before hand is bound to be handicapped in the work he is to do."⁵¹ While criticism did not dissuade Rowland from his work on Davis, it may have persuaded him to adopt a more neutral language in his introduction to the Davis collection.

In 1923 Rowland published his multi-volume work on Davis, as well as a sixteen-page pamphlet on the compendium.⁵² The language of Rowland's introduction to the compendium and that of his essay are in noticeably sharp contrast to one another. In his pamphlet, Rowland depicted Davis in a favorable light. In the speeches of Davis, Rowland wrote that he found "something . . . telling of sweet and noble sentiments."⁵³ Furthermore, he attributes to Davis a "genius of high order" and a "fidelity [to his cause] unsurpassed in the history of the world."⁵⁴ The pamphlet is replete with praise for the Confederate cause and its leaders. Curiously, Rowland's introduction to his compendium—certainly the more noteworthy of the two works—contains only the briefest remarks on the state of Confederate history and refrains from indulging in excessive praise

⁵¹ Grady McWhiney, "Historians as Southerners," *Continuity* 9 (1984): 4.

⁵² Dunbar Rowland, *Jefferson Davis's Place in History as Revealed in his Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Jackson: MDAH, 1923); and *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers, and Speeches*, ed. Dunbar Rowland, 10 vols. (Jackson: MDAH, 1923).

⁵³ Rowland, *Jefferson Davis's Place in History*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

of Davis.⁵⁵ One wonders if Rowland tempered his usual enthusiasm for the Confederate cause out of concern for how academic circles might receive his work on Davis. If southerners found Rowland's introduction to the compendium lacking in praise for their hero, his pamphlet's lauding Davis might appease injured sensibilities.

While Rowland had shifted his focus to research and publishing in the second decade of his career, he still remained active in promoting and developing the field of archives. In particular, he maintained a professional interest in the plans to establish a national archives. During his 1910 presentation on archival classification at the International Congress of Archivists, Rowland spoke in favor of a national archives. In July 1911 Rowland and his mentor, Thomas Owen, submitted a joint memorial to Congress, calling for the establishment of such an archives.⁵⁶ The campaign to build the archives was well underway at the time of Rowland and Owen's memorial. Since the 1890s the AHA, under the leadership of J. Franklin Jameson,

⁵⁵ Rowland's ardor to protect the history of the South from misrepresentation led to a dispute in the early 1930s between Rowland and the editors of the *Dictionary of American Biography*. Rowland had agreed to write a dozen sketches of southern political figures for the publication, but withdrew them after failing to resolve a disagreement with editors Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone over their editing of his sketch on Robert Andrews Hill. The editors had significantly shortened Rowland's sketch, which exceeded the established word limit, eliminated much of his flowery prose and genealogical rambblings, and exchanged terms like "War for Southern Independence" for the decidedly more neutral "Civil War." Rowland publicly charged the publication with partisanship and sectional bias in two pamphlets that he published in 1931 and 1932. See: Rowland, *The "Dictionary of American Biography": A Partisan, Sectional, Political Publication* (Jackson: MDAH, 1931) and Rowland, *The "Dictionary of American Biography": A Protest Continued* (Jackson: MDAH, 1932).

⁵⁶ *Memorial to the Department of Archives and History of the States of Mississippi and Alabama, Respectively, Relative to a National Archives Building*, 62nd Cong., 1st sess., [1911]. S. Doc. 64.

had spearheaded the national archives movement.⁵⁷ Inadequate storage facilities and an exponential growth in the volume of federal records since the American Civil War fueled the urgency to establish a facility to house federal records. Although federal records were still accessible for administrative and historical use, they were scattered in over a hundred inadequate facilities throughout Washington, DC, costing the United States government over \$50,000 a year in rent.

The National Archives was finally established in 1934. World War I and squabbling between the House and Senate over a federal buildings program impeded progress towards securing the archives. When Congress finally passed legislation providing for the establishment of the national archives, Dunbar Rowland was one of two contenders for the position of United States Archivist. Senator Pat Harrison of Mississippi launched an aggressive campaign on Rowland's behalf. Unfortunately for Rowland, opposing forces prevailed. The AHA exerted significant influence over the appointment, and its leaders supported R. D. W. Connor, the head of the Department of History and Government at the University of North Carolina.⁵⁸

Professionally, Connor fit the profile of the first national archivist envisioned by Jameson and the AHA more closely than Rowland. Connor was an academically trained historian, unlike Rowland, and in Jameson's estimation, this qualification was key to the position. Jameson likely would not have admired Rowland's scholarship or his sectional bias; and while

⁵⁷ J. Franklin Jameson was an eminent historian and founding member of the American Historical Association (AHA). He received the first doctorate in history awarded at Johns Hopkins University, where he studied under Herbert Baxter Adams. Jameson was responsible for convincing the AHA to establish a committee on the national archives in 1908. James B. Rhoads, *J. Franklin Jameson and the Birth of the National Archives, 1906-1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 14; Donald R. McCoy, "The Struggle to Establish a National Archives in the United States," *Prologue* (Summer 1984): 75-89; and Lester J. Cappon, "The National Archives and the Historical Profession," *Journal of Southern History* 35, 4 (November 1969): 477-99.

⁵⁸ Donald R. McCoy, "The Crucial Choice: The Appointment of R. D. W. Connor as Archivist of the United States," *American Archivist* 37, no. 3 (July 1974): 399-413.

both men were Democrats, which Jameson believed was crucial to courting the support of President Roosevelt, Connor possessed a broad national base of support, and Rowland's support came largely from the South. Jameson also objected to Rowland on the grounds of age (seventy) and because of Rowland's use of partisan politics to attempt to secure the position.⁵⁹ It is likely that Rowland undermined his chances with his 1915 campaign to reform the AHA from what he perceived to be an oligarchy of influential historians, including Jameson, running the organization. This oligarchy, Rowland believed, dominated the organization, its elections, and appointments. Rowland took Jameson to task in a very public fashion during the AHA's annual meeting and later in the pages of the periodical the *Nation*.⁶⁰

Ultimately, Jameson's forces prevailed. Roosevelt appointed Connor, in what one scholar opines was a triumph of scholarship over politics.⁶¹ Jameson's concerns regarding Rowland's physical state were not without merit. Rowland battled chronic illness for a number of years, even receiving treatment at the Mayo Clinic, before succumbing in 1937, only three years after the establishment of the National Archives. Jameson likely was aware of Rowland's declining health, since they saw each other regularly at meetings of the AHA. Connor

⁵⁹ Ibid, 400, 409.

⁶⁰ Ray Allen Billington, "Tempest in Clio's Teapot: The American Historical Rebellion in 1915," *American Historical Review* 78, no. 1 (April 1973): 350-53. While Billington notes that Rowland and the other protestors (John Latane and Frederic Bancroft) had reason to complain about the controlling influence of a select group of historians within the AHA, he dismisses Rowland as an "over ambitious self-seeker with an inordinate appetite for posts he lacked the talent to hold," 349. See also: Frederick Bancroft, John H. Latane and Dunbar Rowland, *Why the American Historical Association Needs Thorough Reorganization* (Washington, DC, National Capital Press, 1915); Dunbar Rowland, *The Government of the American Historical Association: A Plea for a Return to the Constitution* (n.p., 1914); and Morey D. Rothberg, "To Set a Standard of Workmanship and Compel Men to Conform to It": John Franklin Jameson as Editor of the *American Historical Review*," *American Historical Review* 89 no. 4 (October 1984): 957-75.

⁶¹ McCoy, "Crucial Choice," 412.

was fifty-six years old at the time of his appointment and served until 1941. The National Archives flourished under his leadership, taking a pioneering role in records conservation and preservation and in establishing archives as a distinct and respected profession in the United States.⁶²

While Rowland's accomplishments would not include first United States Archivist, this defeat was not the defining moment in his long and distinguished career. In a 1912 address to the AHA, Rowland discussed what he believed to be the ideal qualifications for an archivist:

The idea that an archivist must be some old fossil who croons over ancient manuscripts like a miser over his gold is about as far from the true conception of what the archivist should be as an Italian garden on Como is from a collection of stunted pines on a barren hillside. The archivist should be an accomplished man of letters who has specialized in history, political science, law, and archival science. He should be a man of affairs, with something of the politician in his make-up, for appropriations are necessary to his work, and he must deal with congresses and legislatures in order to make it a success. It goes without saying that he must love his work, and have the capacity to make others realize its importance. The archivist should be a combination of the scholar, the college professor, the lawyer, the politician, and the business man, for no other profession calls for more varied talents.⁶³

Ten years into his archival career, Rowland already knew well of what he wrote. He learned through experience the qualities necessary in an archivist, as reflected in his successes as an administrator, historian, lobbyist, and theorist. When he assumed the directorship of the MDAH, the archival profession was largely non-existent in the United States. There was only one model of a state archives for him to follow, and it was only one year older than his own institution, hardly established

⁶² Ibid, 413.

⁶³ Rowland, "Adaptation of Archives," 272.

enough to provide a tested example. Archival theory was primarily the province of Europeans, whose archival practices varied among countries. His travels abroad convinced him of the necessity for systematic standards for the emerging American archival movement. Rowland was among the first American archivists to propose a systematized scheme for archival arrangement. While others who came after him may have been more influential in the codification of archival practice, the movement's roots lay with Rowland and his contemporaries who first presented their ideas in a public forum in those early decades of the twentieth century.

In Mississippi Rowland established a successful state archives program. While he did not develop the model for his agency, his public promotions of the "Mississippi Plan" undoubtedly factored into the adoption of the plan by other states. Internally, Rowland brought order to the chaos of the state records, and his vision and transcription efforts, for which he had to lobby for funding, resulted in more complete sets of records of Mississippi's provincial history. He was the driving force in establishing a state library and a Hall of Fame in Mississippi, in which his portrait now hangs. His scholarly publishing efforts provided a foundation on which later generations of historians could build; and among his most important documentary projects, the *Compiled Military Service Records* have aided scores of researchers in the century since the project's inception.

On the national scene, Rowland probably did not achieve the stature he desired, as his failure to capture the post of United States Archivist attests. Rowland's lack of academic historical training likely acted at times as a barrier to greater successes in his professional circles. The key decision-makers in the AHA, Rowland's primary professional organization, held doctorates in history, unlike Rowland who held a degree in law. Rowland undoubtedly viewed himself as a historian, as his summation of the "ideal archivist" suggests. That the upper echelons of the AHA viewed Rowland as an intellectual peer, however, remains in question. Rowland's 1915 campaign to reform the organization suggests that he never successfully broached the "inner circle" of decision-makers who could have elevated him to positions of greater leadership within the AHA and on the national archives scene. Rowland's legacy as an early leader

in establishing a state archives tradition, in documenting the history of his state, and as an early theorist in the formative years of American archival development, however, is one that cannot be dismissed in telling the story of southern and American archival pioneers.

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