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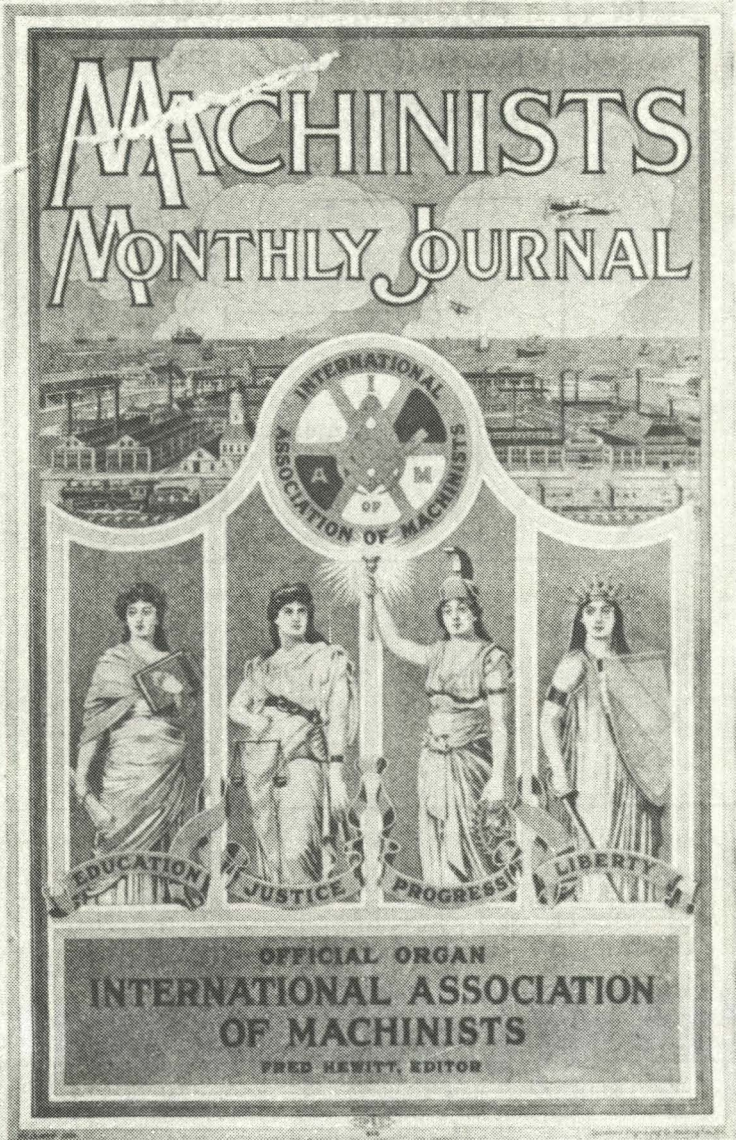
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AN EMERGING ARCHIVAL INSTITUTION: THE SOUTHERN LABOR ARCHIVES

Robert Dinwiddie and Leslie Hough

There are now many emerging archival agencies in the region and nation. Each new archives requires certain actions on the part of the archivist for its firm establishment and the promotion of growth. One such repository is the Southern Labor Archives. This article presents a brief history of the Southern Labor Archives, allowing an analysis of some influences common to the development of emerging archival agencies.

The Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University was the second labor archives generated by the influence of the Association of Southern Labor Historians (ASLH). A group of historians concerned about the lack of academic attention to the southern working class came together during the 1966 meeting of the Southern Historical Association and organized the ASLH. The group intended to stimulate study of the southern trade union movement by collecting union records and by presenting papers on labor history at meetings concurrent with those of the Southern Historical Association.

Dr. George Green of the University of Texas at Arlington returned home from this meeting and began a series of conversations with Texas-Arlington faculty and administrators, as well as Texas labor leaders. These discussions led to the creation of the Texas Labor Archives at Arlington in 1967.

That same year, academics and labor officials in Pennsylvania initiated a similar archives at Pennsylvania State University. These two emerging archives joined the labor archives of Detroit's Wayne State University as the only research centers in the nation dedicated exclusively to preserving and making available the historical records of the American labor movement.

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Dr. Hough is Archivist of the Southern Labor Archives.

Machinists Monthly Journal, vol. 34, no. 3 (March, 1922), Fred Hewitt,
Editor. Courtesy of the Southern Labor Archives, Printed Collections.

Dr. Green reported on the progress of the Texas Labor Archives at the SHA convention in December, 1968. His favorable report encouraged Dr. Merl E. Reed, a labor history specialist at Georgia State University, to wonder if such an archives could be established at Georgia State University. As Dr. Green had done earlier, Dr. Reed introduced the idea to university and labor officials. His timing was fortuitous; Atlanta labor leaders informed him that a committee was already at work searching for an appropriate way to honor veteran labor attorney Joseph Jacobs.¹ Reed suggested to the committee that it consider providing the initial endowment for the "Joseph Jacobs Labor History Archives" to be established within the Georgia State University Library. Reed's idea was that the university would provide space, staff, and all supplies necessary to operate the archives.

The Labor Awards Committee decided to inaugurate an annual "Labor Man of the Year" award and name Mr. Jacobs the first recipient. This award was to be presented at a banquet, the profits from which would be donated to GSU as seed money for the labor archives. The first banquet was held on May 1, 1969; it raised \$3,800 for the archives. This success encouraged the committee to make the banquet an annual affair, both as a way of honoring a person with a distinguished labor union career and as a source of constant funding for the archives.

A committee of Georgia State University administrators and faculty presented a draft contract to the Labor Awards Committee in August, 1969.² After gaining the committee's approval of the contract, they then submitted it to the University System Board of Regents in March, 1970; it was subsequently signed in April, 1970. This contract stipulated that the archives would be placed physically and administratively within the GSU library and would be named the Southern Labor Archives instead of the Joseph Jacobs Labor History Archives, as it had been discovered that a state law forbade naming buildings or facilities in state-supported schools for living persons.

The search for an archivist began in September, 1970, after Dr. Philip Mason, Director of the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University, visited GSU as a consultant and recommended that the position be advertised in national archival, library, and historical journals. David B. Gracy II, a recent Ph. D. graduate in history from Texas Tech University with archival experience in that school's Southwest Collection and in the Texas State Archives, was hired in July, 1971.



Richmond Typographical Union, No. 90

OFFICE OF SECRETARY-TREASURER

Richmond, Va., Dec 12th 1912

Richmond Typographical Union 7/10/90
Richmond Va

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worked in my printing office for more
than five years and to my certain know-
ledge he has been working as printer
for a number of years since he was
last in my employ.
R. J. Mayo

R. J. Mayo to the Richmond Typographical Union, Dec. 12, 1912.
Courtesy of the Southern Labor Archives, Records of the Richmond
Typographical Union No. 90.

Dr. Gracy acquired the first significant collection – the records of Atlanta Typographical Union No. 48 – before he had shelf space available or a staff assembled. In fact, by the time physical space and a small staff of catalogers were acquired in March, 1972, Gracy already had acquired several substantial manuscript collections. By the spring of 1972, Gracy was able to present the SLA's first "List of Holdings" to those persons attending the Fourth Annual Labor Awards Banquet.

The Southern Labor Archives differed from the labor archives at Wayne State University and Pennsylvania State University in that it sought to collect the records of all labor organizations in a stated geographical area – the Southeast – while they concentrated on the records of one or more international unions. Emphasizing this regional interest, Gracy sought and received the official blessings of several state AFL-CIO councils in the

South. The Georgia State AFL-CIO was the first such organization to endorse the work of the Archives. It also boosted the Archives' credibility by donating its non-current records to the Archives. The state AFL-CIO councils of Florida, Virginia, and South Carolina soon made similar endorsements. These actions ratified the accomplishments and goals of the Archives.

The creation of the Southern Labor Archives inspired labor scholars and active unionists in the Atlanta area to seek a more stable forum for the discussion of southern labor history. This common concern led to the planning of the Southern Labor History Conference, bringing together active unionists, scholars, and others interested in the subject. The same Labor Awards Committee that had been so instrumental in creating the Archives liked the idea and offered to sponsor the event in cooperation with the Archives. Subsequently, the first annual Southern Labor History Conference was held April 1 - 3, 1976, coinciding with the Seventh Annual Labor Awards Banquet.

The concept of the Southern Labor History Conference, however, as the concept of the Archives itself, can be traced to the Association of Southern Labor Historians, which during its existence issued an infrequent newsletter and conducted sessions on labor history as part of the annual proceedings of its parent organization, the Southern Historical Association. The 1976 Conference participants decided to resurrect the ASLH as the Southern Labor History Association, and appointed a committee to begin work on the second conference, which was successfully held in May, 1978. The name of the new association was changed during the period between the two conferences to the Southern Labor Studies Association, in order to reflect more accurately the broad interests of the membership, all focusing on the study of the labor movement in the South.

While the Southern Labor Archives has always been committed to activity beyond the preservation of historical research materials, the development of its manuscript holdings must rank as the most important factor in the growth and maturation of any repository. A partial list of manuscript collections retained by the Archives includes the records of the United Textile Workers of America; the Southern regional offices of the International Woodworkers of America and the Service Employees International Union; the AFL-CIO state councils of Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina; the central labor unions of Augusta, Atlanta, Asheville, Jacksonville, Savannah, and Chattanooga; Carpenters union locals of Macon, Savannah, Tallahassee, and Newport News; Typographical union locals in Atlanta,

Birmingham, Tampa, and Jacksonville; Machinists union locals in Atlanta and Anniston; Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers of Macon; labor attorneys Joseph Jacobs, and Adair, Goldthwaite, Stanford and Daniel; and the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, Southern Office. Significant bodies of records deposited in the Archives but not yet arranged and described are: AFL-CIO Region 8 (Knoxville); Atlanta Public School Teachers Association; and records of the Georgia, South Carolina, Maryland, and Kentucky Nurses Associations.

These collections from state nurses' associations reflect an increase in collective bargaining activity by some professional associations and thus a natural impetus for the broadening of the collecting activities of the Southern Labor Archives in order to document this trend. Collections like the state nurses' associations also help to document the changes in a profession made up predominantly of women, a growing proportion of America's work force and a group whose participation in our nation's economic life is the object of increasing scholarly attention. Just as the records of nurses' associations are useful for research on women's history as well as the history of the working class, so too can many of the collections in the Archives be helpful in researching subjects relating to the political, social and economic history of the South.

The experience of beginning and developing the Southern Labor Archives reveals several factors important to ensuring the strength and permanency of new archival agencies. For emerging institutions like the Archives at Georgia State University, it is crucial that supportive relationships are established and maintained with their three principal constituencies: administrators in the sponsoring agency, researchers, and patrons.

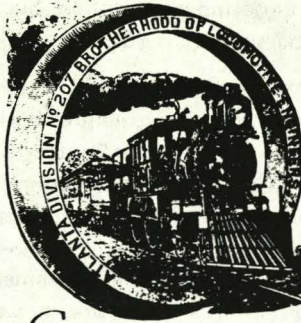
The most important supporting element for an archives is the parent organization and administrative unit within which the archives is positioned. It is crucial that the administrator of an archival agency constantly educate his or her administrative superiors on the value of the archival function. The most effective means of documenting a record of accomplishment to these top administrators is to quantify such performance as the significance, size, and number of collections acquired, those arranged and described, and the types and numbers of researchers served. Through the periodic, usually annual, report the archivist can transmit the highlights of progress made and suggest goals for the future to her or his superiors. At least as important to this educational process between archivist and administrator is a frequent, steady flow of communication from the archivist to

the administrator on important developments and current needs of the archives. Face to face meetings are usually the best setting for this communication process. This policy of close consultation has enabled the Southern Labor Archives to command a generous and increasing share of the resources, staff, space, and equipment in the Library at Georgia State University.

The second major constituency of an emerging archives is researchers. The archivist's responsibility to the researcher does not end when he or she sets adequate hours and convenient procedures. A serious problem of many archival facilities is the failure to report newly-processed records or manuscript collections to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, scholarly journals, or other appropriate media. As another means of assisting researchers, several prominent archival facilities have established programs for the payment of stipends to persons for research use in their collections. Sponsorship of conferences, scholarly or otherwise, giving researchers an opportunity to present an exposition of their results, is an excellent tool for the archivist to encourage the work of researchers. The Southern Labor Archives has made use of the Southern Labor History Conference, as mentioned earlier, for these purposes.

Patrons, the third constituency of a new archives, may also find a conference to be an attractive forum for learning more about their field of interest. Moreover, such meetings strengthen the patrons' ties to the sponsoring archival agency. The patrons of an emerging archival agency will usually have had some essential role in the founding of the repository, although they may or may not be interested in actually using the material collected by the archives. In the case of the Southern Labor Archives, the patrons have been southern labor historians, many of whom are also researchers in the collections, and leaders of organized labor in the South, who are concerned primarily with the preservation of the history of organized labor in the region. Genealogical societies, local historical agencies, scholarly associations, or other special interest groups may form the patron constituency for other repositories. Creation of a specialized association or friends group that can serve to stimulate interest in a repository is not always justified, based on the large commitment of time involved. Nevertheless, patrons can perform a vital role in forming a base of support for an archival agency while its collection is being built. This support can take tangible form when patrons supply funds or services that may well be unavailable from the organization sponsoring the repository. Perhaps more important

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paid him all his expenses & in other
division assisted us. Hoping you
will be able to do something this
year with best wishes from your
brother

Chas E. Adams

Charles E. Adams, Atlanta Division No. 207 of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, to S. W. Wasner, Macon Division No. 210 of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, Sept. 8, 1900. Courtesy of the Southern Labor Archives, Records of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, Simpson Lodge 210.

is the influence, political or otherwise, that patrons can exert on the governing body of the sponsoring organization. Such help from patrons can be essential in gaining the support needed for building an archival facility of the first rank.

The effort to increase the involvement of both patrons and researchers has been carried one step further by the Southern Labor Archives with the creation of the Southern Labor Studies Association. The Association provides an organizational framework within which patrons and researchers can be brought into the process of planning future conferences, and can help in the publication of selected research results and comments from expert patrons. The Association plans to publish a newsletter that will keep researchers and patrons abreast of developments in the Archives and in the general subject field.

Use of the specialized media of patron groups can also be a most effective method of encouraging research and support from potential patrons of an emerging archival facility. Supplying appropriate articles for publication in the journals and newsletters of patrons or related interest groups is often an excellent alternative to developing a journal or newsletter for an understaffed new archives. The Southern Labor Archives has cultivated such an arrangement with the *Journal of Labor*, published by the Georgia AFL-CIO; articles and announcements are thus presented to many of the patrons of the Archives within the ranks of organized labor in Georgia.

Each of these tools for building support for a new or reinvigorated archival facility should be examined in light of the unique circumstances of each repository. A recounting of the potential techniques that archivists can use to stimulate the support and interest of their constituencies could continue at greater length. Such programs are certainly not exclusively applicable to emerging archival agencies. Yet, ultimately our ability to fulfill the mission of documenting our society's heritage will depend upon educating the specialized publics that we serve on the importance of that mission.

¹ The Labor Awards Committee: E. L. Abercrombie, R. E. Shadix, Gid Parham, Harold Bauman, John Wright, Oliver Singleton, Jerome Levine, James Hampton, James Howard, George Caudelle, Irving Gordon, and E. T. Kehrer.

² The Georgia State University Committee: Dr. William Suttles, Dr. George Manners, Dr. Joseph Baylen, Dr. William Pullen, Dr. Dugald Hudson, and V. V. Lavroff. Dr. Charles Vail, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, also played a key role.

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