

THE WATKINS OVERTON PAPERS Memphis/Shelby County Archives

The Memphis/Shelby County Archives staff recently completed processing the papers of Memphis Mayor Watkins Overton. The great-grandson of Memphis founder John Overton, Watkins Overton served as Mayor from 1928 to 1939 and from 1949 to 1953. The collection contains seventy-two boxes of office files arranged in original order, and a finding aid has been created to assist in research.

Memphis grew to become an important national city during Overton's sixteen years in office, a fact that can largely be attributed to the influential Memphis political leader E. H. Crump. A powerful political machine was built by Crump during the 1920s. Overton was chosen to run for Mayor in 1927, and his victory in this election solidified the organization's control over Memphis government. However, Overton was not always a loyal subordinate. Reluctant to accept Crump's leadership, Overton resigned in 1939 and again in 1953.

When Overton first became Mayor in 1928, Memphis had virtually no direct relationship with the federal government. This situation changed when the Great Depression devastated the local economy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal programs to stimulate the economy temporarily, and Memphis was quick to receive the benefit. The New Deal public works programs transformed Memphis. Riverside Drive, John Gaston Hospital, and the Municipal Airport were all constructed with federal funds. Routine public works projects such as street widening and

repairs were also supported with money from Washington, D.C. Federal influence would continue to extend into municipal affairs, so that when Overton returned to office in 1949, almost every city function had a national ingredient. The collection provides scholars with an interesting view of this relationship between federal and local governments.

The Watkins Overton Papers also contain important information on race relations, crime, public ownership of utilities, and Tennessee politics. They are an important window into the Crump era, and compliment the papers of Memphis Mayors Walter Chandler, James Pleasants and Frank Tobey, which are also housed at the Memphis/Shelby County Archives.

Wayne Dowdy, Memphis/Shelby County Archives Memphis/Shelby County Public Library & Information Center

TENNESSEE ARCHIVIST

is the newsletter of the Society of Tennessee Archivists, Members of the Society of

Tennessee Archivists and others are encouraged to submit articles and information on recent acquisitions, publications, exhibits, special programs, grant projects, personnel changes and employment opportunities of interest to the archival constrainty for inclusion in this newsletter.

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Mayor Watkins Overton of Memphis, Tennessee

Correction

The last issue of *Tennessee Archivist* featured a story concerning the Luke Lea Papers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. The author of the story, Greg Poole, made a few minor errors that need to be corrected:

- Luke Lea was born in 1879, not 1878.
- Lea attended Columbia University, not Columbus University.
- The State Democratic Convention, mentioned in paragraph three of the story should be the 1906 Convention, instead of the 1908 Convention.
- Gov. Malcolm R. Patterson was not a close ally of Lea's.
- Lea was elected to the U.S. Senate by two votes in the Tennessee General Assembly, not "overwhelmingly" as stated.
- Lea was not the youngest man to be elected to the United States Senate;
 Henry Clay of Kentucky was.
- Lea was investigated, not court-martialed, for his attempt to kidnap the Kaiser of Germany.
- Senator Lea was not associated with Caldwell & Co., although he did receive financial support from Rogers Caldwell. He was later cleared of all wrongdoing on the charges of which he was convicted.
- Lea was paroled but not pardoned on April 1, 1936.
- Senator Lea did not suffer from ill health in his later years; this only occurred during the final weeks of his life.
- Luke Lea passed away on Nov. 18, 1945, not November 17.
- Senator Luke Lea contributed the original 868 acres for the Warner Parks in Nashville, although it does not carry his name.

This information was graciously provided by the daughter of Senator Lea, Mrs. Mary Louise Tidwell, Nashville, Tenn.

STA Member News 4

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES, NASHVILLE, TENN.

The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee now has a web site at the following address:

http://www.sbhla.org/

The site currently has some general information about the services and collections in the library and archives. The site also includes the guidelines and application form for study grants from the Archives. Applications for study grants can be made online. We hope it will be useful to researchers.

Bill Sumners, Director and Archivist Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives bsumners@EDGE.NET

ARCHIVES OF APPALACHIA, EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY, JOHNSON CITY, TENN.

Following several months of self-study as part of the administrative reporting structure transition from the Sherrod Library to the Center, the Archives of Appalachia has recently reorganized its operations.

Previously known as Archives and Special Collections with subdivisions of Archives of Appalachia, University Archives, and Special Collections, the archives will now be known as the Archives of Appalachia. It consists of three units: Appalachian Manuscript Collections, University Archives, and Special Collections (the department's book collection).

Staff positions and responsibilities have changed to reflect the overall restructuring of the department. For several years the archives operated with a public services archivist (responsible for reference service) and a technical services archivist (responsible for collection processing). Now there will be a University Archivist (Ned Irwin), responsible for both reference and processing of the university collections and an Appalachian Archivist (Marie Tedesco), responsible for reference and processing of the Appalachian collections. In addition, the positions of office manager (Georgia Greer) and archive assistant (Ed Speer) have increased responsibilities under the new plan. The title of department head (Norma Myers) has changed to that of Curator of the Archives of Appalachia.

"The changes are the result of an intense study over a period of

several months undertaken by the archives staff of all aspects of the archives' operations. The new structure we feel will make the archives more efficient and effective in meeting the mission of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the university," said Norma Myers, archives curator.

NewsCASS, Spring-Summer Issue, 1998 Archives of Appalachia East Tennessee State University

TENNESSEE STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES ARCHIVES & MANUSCRIPTS UNIT, NASHVILLE, TENN.

Over the past several months several significant collections have been microfilmed and are now available for use at the State Library and Archives. One such collection is the Capt. Simon Perkins, Jr. Papers. The collection was loaned to the Tennessee State Library and Archives for microfilming by the Summit County (Ohio) Historical Society, although the collection is on deposit at the University of Akron. Perkins was the Federal Assistant Quartermaster in Nashville from February, 1862 through July, 1864, and the collection contains more than twenty-thousand items documenting Perkins' service during that period.

Another significant collection are the Quartermaster William Alonzo Wainwright Papers. The Wainwright Papers is a Tennessee Historical Society Collection for which processing has been completed, and the collection is scheduled to be microfilmed as this is being written. Wainwright served as chief quartermaster in charge of the department in Knoxville. The papers cover mostly the period from January, 1863 through June, 1868. The collection consists of approximately 20,000 items, and consists mainly of accounting documents.

Union quartermasters had a number of responsibilities, including the purchase and disbursement of food, clothing, horses, and other supplies, payment for services by non-military personnel, travel permits for both military and civilians. After the war ended Wainwright's department was also charged with the sale of excess army property, reimbursement of claims against the Union army, and with the location, identification, and re-interment of the Union dead. Wainwright was most involved in the interments at the Union cemeteries in Knoxville, Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, and in Atlanta, Georgia.

Together, these two collections provide unique insight into an area of Federal military operations in Tennessee which heretofore it

would not have been possible to cover to any appreciable depth.

Currently being processed are the Joe C. Carr Papers, 1931-1977. Mr. Carr served as Tennessee Secretary of State for 32 years. Also being processed are the Records of Tennessee Attorney-General & Reporter, 1920-1960 (Record Group 241); the U.S. Senator Harlan Mathews Papers, and the Gov. Ned Ray McWherter Gubernatorial Papers.

Also now available on microfilm are the Governor Ray Blanton Papers. Blanton, who died in 1996, served as Governor of Tennessee from 1975 to 1979.

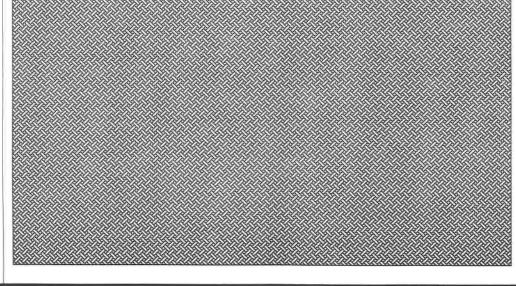
Mrs. Mary Thweatt is doing well after another round of surgery. Mrs. Janey Gleaves continues to improve after her transplant surgery last year.

John-Paul Richiuso Stewart Southard Tennessee State Library and Archives

OTHER NEWS...

STA Member David Swift of Nashville was recently featured on *Tennessee Crossroads*, a public television program produced by WDCN-TV in Nashville. Mr. Swift discussed conservation of historical documents and maps.

Special Collections, Heard Library, Vanderbilt University was recently cited in *The Nashville Scene* newspaper as "Best Place to Fritter Away a Rainy Afternoon" in it's annual "Best of Nashville" issue.



DEATH OF DR. ROBERT CRONEBERGER

Robert B. Croneberger, director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh since 1986, died Friday, February 27, 1998, due to complications following heart by-pass surgery. Croneberger had served as State Librarian and Archivist for the State of Tennessee from 1985 to 1986. He also had served on the governing council of the American Library Association (ALA) from 1984-88, the Intellectual Freedom Committee (1989-91) and Legislation Committee (1994-present). He was a past chair of the ALA Accreditation Committee and the Urban Libraries Council.

During the challenge to the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996, Croneberger testified as an expert witness on behalf of the ALA. His testimony was cited three times in the judge's decision. Bruce Ennis, lead council for the ALA and the coalition of organizations that challenged the CDA, said "Bob's assistance was truly invaluable. Many people know that Bob testified in the trial and testified brilliantly, but few people know of the many, many hours Bob worked tirelessly behind the scenes, out of the spotlight, helping to conceptualize the issues, compile needed information, prepare affidavits and submit to grueling depositions... Throughout that long and stressful process, Bob was an inspiration to us all."

Donations may be made to *Beginning with Books*, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Homewood Branch, 7101 Hamilton Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15208-1828. For more information, contact the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Community Relations. Telephone: (412) 622-5102. Fax: (412) 688-8609.

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INTERNET ACCESS LAWSUIT FILED IN COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE

The January issue of Government Technology magazine reported that The Putnam Pit, a weekly paper in Cookeville, Tenn., has filed a lawsuit against the City of Cookeville as an effort to gain access to "cookie" files, browser histories, and cache files on municipal computers. The newspaper's publisher maintains that these files "could show whether taxpayers are footing the bill for city employees access to Internet sites focusing on such issues as white supremacy, pornography, and pedophilia."

Tennessee is an open-records state. Unless a law or regulation states otherwise, records produced by a government entity in the course of doing business are open to public scrutiny. This statute treats records in all formats equally. The success of the lawsuit depends upon whether the plaintiff can convince a court that these sort of files are "records" as defined in the law.

John H. Woodard, Jr. Knox County (Tenn.) Records Management

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



As of the publication of this newsletter, THE SOUTHERN ARCHIVISTS CONFERENCE has completed a very successful April, 1998 meeting in Selma, Alabama. Our congratulations and thanks to the organizers of the Selma meeting. Tentatively, the next meeting of SAC will be held in Memphis, Tennessee in 2000. Planning for the Fall 1998 Meeting of the SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE ARCHIVISTS is underway. We will be meeting at Historic Rugby

(Morgan Co., Tenn.), November 4-6, 1998. A three-day meeting is planned in accordance with our meeting changes enacted by the STA membership in 1995. A full itinerary will be published in a future issue of the STA newsletter. At present, a rough outline of the meeting events looks something like this:

Wed., Nov. 4 Registration and Workshop on Disaster Planning. Tour of Historic Rugby.

Thurs., Nov. 5 Sessions on Appraisals; Recording Oral Histories; Historic Rugby; the Big South Fork Region; Banquet and Entertainment.

Fri., Nov. 6 Committee Reports, Business Session, Elections and Adjournment.

In the next issue of the newsletter, I will include a list of hotels and Bed & Breakfasts in the area along with costs, distances and expenses for your information.

As noted in the last newsletter, THE SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE ARCHMISTS now has a web site. We can be found at http://www.arkay.net/tnarchivist. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions on this website, please do not bring them to our newsletter editor (David Sowell, TSLA). He does not administer the site. I do. I can be reached at mjohnson@tntech.edu. Suggestions and constructive criticism are welcome.

Doris Martinson (Knox County Archives) has agreed to chair a committee to study the establishment of professional qualifications and standards for the archival profession. The committee is comprised of Barbara Flannery (Memphis/Shelby Co. Archives), Sara Harwell (Vanderbilt University-Heard Library, Special Collections), Ned Irwin (ETSU Archives of Appalachia) and Ken Fieth (Archives of Metro Nashville/Davidson Co.). I have complete faith in their ability to do so.

Dr. James Neal (Gore Research Center) reports that we have reason to be hopeful that Middle Tennessee State University will one day offer a program in archives as a part of the Public History Program already in place there. Regrettably I have not yet found the time to get the STA Program of Basic Archival Training Workshops going. I hope to begin working on that area in the next several months.

I've been on the job as president about four months now. I have to say that there is a lot more to this than there would appear to be from the outside. The job has been made easier by the commitment and professionalism of the archivists that I have come in contact with. I have yet to be refused help or advice. This profession is indeed fortunate to attract individuals of this caliber.

Mancil Johnson, Tennessee Technological University Archives President, STA

THE SOUTHERN ARCHIVISTS CONFERENCE SELMA, ALABAMA, APRIL 6-7, 1998

The Southern Archivists Conference convened at the St. James Hotel, located in Selma, Alabama on Monday, April 6, 1996. The member groups of the SAC – the Louisiana Archives and Manuscripts Association, the Society of Alabama Archivists, the Society of Mississippi Archivists

and the Society of Tennessee Archivists were in attendance. The 1998 Southern Archivists Conference was hosted by the Society of Alabama Archivists.

On the opening day of the conference, the welcome to the conference was delivered by Jim Baggett, President of the Society of Alabama Archivists. A lively keynote address was delivered by Dr. Alston Fitts, author of *Selma*: *Queen City of the Black Belt* and historian for the City of Selma, Alabama.

Session One of the conference was *Documentation Strategies for Resources in Alabama History*, with Martin T. Oliff, Auburn University Archives, and Bodie Morin, the Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark. Session Two was *Dealing with Dealers and Donors*, with Carol Mathias, Nicholls State University, and Bruce Turner, University of Southwest Louisiana.

After the day's sessions, members of SAC conducted individual sightseeing tours of Selma, Alabama; visiting the Old Live Oak Cemetery, the National Voting Rights Museum, the Edmund S. Pettus Bridge, Sturdivant House, the Old Depot Museum and other historical attractions.

That evening, a banquet was held at the St. James Hotel. The speaker was Ms. Kathryn Tucker Windham, Alabama historian, folklorist, storyteller and author of A Sampling of Selma Stories, Twice

Blessed, and other work. Ms. Windham's speech was enthusiastically received by the participants of the Conference.

Day Two of the Southern Conference had the third session, Scrapbooks, Oral History Collections, and Other Problems with Mixed Media, with Susan Tucker, Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University; Lisa Baldwin, University of South Alabama; and Erin Kellen, folklorist/archivist from Montgomery, Alabama.

Session Four discussed Redox: Vinegar Syndrome and Other Diseases of Microfilm, with Kay James, and Jim Pitts, both from the Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

After lunch, several breakout sessions met at the Hotel. These sessions consisted of *Documenting Civil Rights and Race Relations*, moderated by Kathy Smith, Vanderbilt University Special Collections; *Are You On-Line? Experiences in Automating*, chaired by Barbara Flannery, Memphis-Shelby County Archives; *Congressional Collections*, presided by Mancil Johnson, Tennessee Technological University Archives; and *Professional Standards and Education for Archivists*, moderated by Doris Rivers-Martinson, Knox County Archives.

A splendid lunch was served at the St. James Hotel, after which reports from the participating state groups were given. A suggestion was made to form a chairmanship position to coordinate future Southern Archivists Conference meetings. The members of the Society of Mississippi Archivists displayed blueprint drawings for the new archives building to be constructed in Jackson, Mississippi and asked for comment and suggestions from other states' members. The 1998 SAC meeting then adjourned, to reconvene in Memphis, Tennessee in the year 2000.

MISSISSIPPI UNSEALS FILES OF AGENCY THAT FOUGHT DESEGREGATION

After a 21-year court fight, the state of Mississippi on Tuesday unsealed more than 124,000 pages of previously secret files from a state agency that used spy tactics, intimidation, false imprisonment, jury tampering and other illegal methods to thwart the activities of civil rights workers during the 1950s, '60s and early '70s.

Like an eerie journey into a shadowy past, the files of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission provide a profoundly unsettling reminder of the state's determination to maintain a segregated society.

The commission's investigators made note of the pigmentation, associations, religious beliefs and sexual proclivities of the civil rights workers they tracked. They jotted down the license plate numbers of cars parked at civil rights meetings and peeked into bank accounts. Informants, many of them black Mississippians, reported to the commission about plans for marches and boycotts.

In some cases, the potential for using violence against civil rights workers is discussed in commission memorandums. Although none of the documents reviewed Tuesday show a direct state hand in the numerous deaths of activists in Mississippi during those years, they clearly reflect the mindset of the day.

The release of the Sovereignty Commission files here comes at a time when the South is making fresh efforts to disinter the history of some of its most tortured times.

After years of silence, the family of Martin Luther King Jr. is encouraging efforts to discover whether James Earl Ray really was responsible for the 1968 assassination of the civil rights leader. Federal investigators in Birmingham have reopened the case of the 1963 bombing of the 16th Avenue Baptist Church, which killed four girls.

Last week in Little Rock, former members of the Women's Emergency Committee' to Open Our Schools held a news conference to publicly release its membership roster for the first time. Because members feared for their physical and economic well-being, the group worked largely underground between 1958 to 1963 to reopen schools that had been closed by Gov. Orval Faubus to deter court-ordered desegregation.

In Mississippi, several civil rights activists who were the subjects of Sovereignty Commission investigations said Tuesday that they may use their newly-released records to file lawsuits against the state. Prosecutors said that it also is possible that information found in the files could be used to press criminal charges against alleged perpetrators, if they are still alive.

The unsealing of the Sovereignty Commission files Tuesday concluded a two-decade legal battle that began in 1977, the year the Mississippi State Legislature voted the commission out of existence and sealed its records for 50 years. The American Civil Liberties Union and several individual plaintiffs filed suit to keep the records open, and in 1989 U.S. District Court Judge William Barbour ordered that they be released.

It took nine more years to satisfy appeals and to establish a process for allowing subjects of the commission's investigations to exert their rights to keep their own files private. Approximately 7,700 pages out of a total of 132,000 pages of files remain secret because 42 people claimed those privacy rights, according to Katie Blount, a spokeswoman for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, which has maintained and indexed the files.

The Sovereignty Commission, which was created in 1956 with a \$250,000 budget "to protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, and her sister states, from encroachment thereon by the federal government," formally existed until 1977, although its funding was eliminated three years earlier. It was the model for

similar agencies that fought desegregation in other states across the South, including Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas. In many instances, the agencies shared intelligence information.

The unsealing of the Sovereignty Commission files has generated a vigorous debate here between those who believe that the ugliness of the past should remain buried and those who believe that only a full airing can bring healing.

In addition, some civil rights activists have fought the opening of the files because they believe their release could victimize the subjects of Sovereignty Commission investigations once again by releasing unsavory, and possibly untrue, details about their personal lives.

One of the few living members of the Sovereignty Commission, Betty Long, 69, said Tuesday that she too was pleased that the files had been opened. "I want facts to be known instead of innuendo and rumors," she said, adding that she did not believe that the commission had been involved in murder or other acts of violence. "At the time, everyone in the state was gung-ho to keep things segregated and that was tied in with the idea of the communists taking over. It's something I wish had never happened."

For those who have waited for decades to see what information the state had collected about them, their family members and their friends, the day provided a long-awaited moment of revelation and relief. "Twenty-one years is a long time to wait to see what is in here," said Ellie J. Dahmer, clutching a packet containing the file on her husband, Vernon Dahmer, who was killed when their Hattiesburg house was firebombed in 1966.

No detail was too inconsequential for the commission's spies, as is clear in Schwerner's file. "Rita Schwerner recently purchased a Singer sewing machine in Meridian and had it delivered to 2505½ 5th Street in Meridian," a 1964 memo reports, referring to Schwerner's wife.

The files also reveal an obsession by commission investigators with bloodlines and pigmentation. In a 1958 memorandum, VanLandingham wrote that an Eatonville grocer had reported that "the Negroes at Eatonville are very aggressive, well educated and intelligent. Most of them look practically like white people and apparently have considerable white blood in them."

By KEVIN SACK New York Times March 18, 1998

The South Carolina Department of Archives and History has moved its Worldwide Web homepage to a new server. The address is:

http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/

The site provides information about the Archives, records management services and the State Historic Preservation Office. We are planning several additions and modifications to the pages in anticipation of the move to our new building this Spring.

Please visit us. Your comments and suggestions are very welcome.

Nancy Piester South Carolina Department of Archives and History Tel. (803) 734-7914 Fax (803) 734-3387

SC Archives Homepage: http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/

CIVIL RIGHTS RESEARCH GOING ON THE WEB

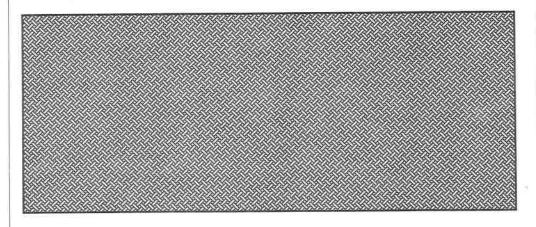
A national center for civil rights research is being prepared for the World Wide Web. The University of Memphis and other archivists are using rare documents and old photographs to make the site for the new Memphis Civil Rights Research Consortium.

"The idea is to share and pool resources that are of interest to professional scholars worldwide," said Tom Mendina, University of Memphis assistant to the director of libraries. Other members of the consortium include: the National Civil Rights Museum, the Memphis public library, and libraries at LeMoyne-Owen College, Shelby State Community College and State Technical Institute at Memphis.

The site currently links to about 10 photographs from *The Commercial Appeal* and the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* of the 1968 sanitation workers' strike leading up to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The University of Memphis library receives frequent requests to peruse its civil rights documents. But with the 30th anniversary of King's assassination approaching in April, researchers have stepped up their pace. "I've had everybody from school kids doing reports to media companies" seeking documents, said Ed Frank, library archivist. "Scholars from all over have contacted us for access to the material."

That material fills acid-free boxes with accounts of events, typed on index cards, from community activists, ministers and others. It also includes manuscripts, several hundred oral histories, magazine clippings, and transcripts of news broadcasts. Work on the Web site also has been slow. Consortium members are working in their spare time and with no funding. An initial application for a grant was denied, but the archivists are seeking funds elsewhere, Frank said. "All of us are doing this with more or less donated or found time," said John Evans, an associate professor coordinating Internet services for the project. The site is: http://www.lib.memphis.edu/spec.html.





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In This Issue....

WATKINS OVERTON PAPERS AT THE MEMPHIS/SHELBY COUNTY ARCHIVES



The Annual Society of Tennessee Archivists

Membership Directory
is now available and included with this issue of

TENNESSEE ARCHIVIST

GOT NEWS?

If you have news about archival collections, acquisitions, special projects, personnel changes, employment opportunities, yada-yada-yada... SEND IT IN!

Deadline for Next Issue: July 20, 1998

From Your Editor