

Tennessee Archivist

SUMMER ISSUE, 1998

DAVID SOWELL, EDITOR

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 community for inclusion in this newsletter.

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Newsletter Editor

David Sowell
c/o Tennessee State
Library and Archives
Technical Services Section
403 Seventh Ave. North
Nashville, TN
37243-0312
drsowell@earthlink.net

Transcribing Civil War Diaries at the University of Tennessee at Martin Special Collections

At that beginning of the spring semester at the University of Tennessee at Martin a most captivating and enlightening project was begun on a set of Civil War diaries that were donated to the Special Collections Department of the Paul Meek Library.

It all began two years ago when a visiting alumnus of U. T. Martin, Wilfred Oldham Head, expressed his interest to donate two diaries that his grandfather Van Buren Oldham had written while serving in the Confederate Army. Being that his grandfather was a native of northwest Tennessee he thought it best that the diaries be preserved and kept in the region. In July of 1996, two well aged and crumbling diaries along with a cracked daguerreotype of Private Oldham were delivered to the library.



MARTIN VAN BUREN OLDHAM

After opening the diaries it became evident that the faded handwritten pages had to be documented for future generations. A student intern from the History Department chose to take on the laborious duty of transcribing the numerous pages. Working on the project day by day, page by page, an image of the inner man became more vivid.

Oldham was a resident of Weakley County, Tennessee when he enlisted in late May of 1861. He signed up with Company G of the 9th Tennessee Infantry, better known locally as "The Hickory Blues", at the age of twenty-one. The 9th was initially sent to Union City for military instruction and by the end of the summer of 1861 the regiment was stationed at Camp Blythe, located near New Madrid, Missouri. The unit crossed the Mississippi in the fall and camped for the winter near Columbus, Kentucky. With the evacuation of Columbus the regiment marched south to Bethel Station, Tennessee. Two days after its arrival the regiment saw action at the Battle of Shiloh, then six months later at the battle of Perryville, where Oldham was wounded and captured by Union forces.

His first diary begins on January of 1863 during his imprisonment. He would write on January 8th, "This has been my first day in a military prison [Camp Dent, Kentucky]. I have had time to look around and have concluded that to stay here one month is equal to death". He was fortunate enough to be shipped north to Camp Douglas, Illinois before the month ended. An illness would overcome Oldham at Camp Douglas and by early February he would be brought to the camp hospital. On

February 9th he would write, "I am still in the hospital and swallowing Yankee medicine. I am still convalescing. My appetite is improving so I look to leave here soon. Three of four die daily in this ward..."

Oldham was finally exchanged April 6th after six months of captivity. Later the same month, he would return to his former unit, which by then was consolidated with the 6th Tennessee Infantry. With the 6th he would be involved in General Braxton Bragg's withdrawal from Middle Tennessee seeing action at the battle of Chickamauga. On September 19th he wrote, "Crossed the mountains without opposition. After double quickening some distance we entered the fight in a charge. We halted and lay down. After firing several rounds I was wounded in the face. I thought at first I was killed..." After the battle he was sent to a hospital in Chattanooga and spent the next several weeks recuperating. On December 3rd, he was sent to Dalton, Georgia to find his regiment in winter quarters.

The year 1864 began quietly enough for Oldham as the regiment remained in winter quarters conducting drills and target practice. Some diversion was found in a large snowball fight in late March. Oldham wrote, "...in all there were six or seven thousand men. We had colors and officers to lead us out and back. We drove the Georgians out of their camp. In the evening we engaged again [and] whipped the whole division."

Early in May the regiment was moved from Dalton to Resaca, Georgia, to face General William T. Sherman's forces. The Battle of Resaca was followed shortly by fighting at Adairsville. These battles marked the beginning of a long conflict in Georgia for Oldham's regiment. As the fighting continued, both Oldham's health and morale suffered. On May 24th he reflected on the anniversary of his enlistment into the army. "Three years of soldiering works quite a change. I was then a stout robust young man - but now one would take me to be at least thirty [and] my health is considerably impaired. Out of the number who taken the oath with me on that day but few are left with the old company now. They have been killed, disabled, discharged, died, not a few deserted..." He was soon sent to the hospital, where he remained until the end of June.

Rejoining his regiment, he entered the ongoing fight against Sherman's march to the sea. He would be involved in the Battle of Peach Tree Creek followed by the Battle of Atlanta. Oldham would write on July 24th that "the contest was almost hand to hand." His regiment would continue to fight in Georgia for the rest of the summer. The second diary ended on August 1st but Oldham remain in the Confederate Army until October of 1864, when he finally took the Oath of Allegiance in Nashville.

Following the war he attended medical school in Louisville. After graduation he returned to Weakley County and setup his own practice in general medicine. He died August 15, 1884 at the age of 44. He is believed to be buried on a family plot just east of Latham, Tennessee.

The transcripts of Van Buren Oldham's diaries are now available on the Internet at:
www.utm.edu/~dullrich/vboldham.htm.

*by Dieter C. Ullrich and Elizabeth Kitts
 University of Tennessee at Martin*



COUNTING DOWN TO TENNESSEE'S FIRST ARCHIVES SUMMIT

The Archives Summit: Substance and Anticipated Outcomes

Plans are moving along quite nicely for Tennessee's first Archives Summit, scheduled for September 24-25, 1998, in Murfreesboro, the early capital of Tennessee. The Archives Summit will be a two-day conference in which local and state officials work with archivists and others interested in historical records in the further development of records management programs, county archives, and other historical records repositories that will result in improved management and preservation of historical records in Tennessee. The emphasis will be on local government archives but will not be limited to them.

The projected outcomes of the Archives Summit are both modest and far-reaching:

- Increased funding for archives and historical records programs in Tennessee
- Creation of an appropriate infrastructure for the development of county archives
- Enhanced public awareness of the importance of archives and historical records
- Improved communications within the archival community
- Creation of effective, ongoing statewide archival support groups
- Establishment of public records commissions in all Tennessee counties
- Improved records management programs at the county level

The Road to Here

Here is a brief summary of the events leading up to this point (roughly July 1, 1998).

Goal II of the *Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Preservation of Historical Records in Tennessee, 1996-2001* calls for a committee to advise the Tennessee Historical Record Advisory Board (THRAB) in carrying out its Strategic Plan, and specifically its plans for an Archival Summit. In September 1997 I appointed an Archives Summit Committee chaired by **Walter Durham** of Gallatin to begin to plan for an Archives Summit in the late summer or fall of 1998. The committee first met in October of 1997, followed in November by a meeting of the Tennessee Historical Records Advisory Board, both of which addressed the fundamentals of an Archives Summit. **Secretary of State Riley C. Darnell** and **Mr. Durham** have agreed to serve as co-chairs of the Archives Summit. I am also pleased to report that our first choices for our two main speakers have accepted our invitations to join us for the Summit: **Dr. Edwin C. Bridges**, Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and **Dr. David B. Gracy II**, Governor Bill Daniel Professor of Archival Enterprise at the University of Texas at Austin.

Plans for the Summit continued apace during the spring of 1998 while the Governor's Office and the Tennessee General Assembly debated our budget for FY 1998/99, which included an improvement package to provide funding for the THRAB and, within that package, funding for the Archives Summit. Through the strong support of Senator Douglas Henry, our improvement requests for these and other archival improvements, including funding for a new Assistant State Archivist position at the State Library and Archives, were approved by the General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor.

As soon as the funding appeared certain, Secretary Darnell sent out letters inviting nominations of persons to attend the Archives Summit. His letter went to all County Executives and, among many others, all members of the Society of Tennessee Archivists. Although the Summit Committee had originally recommended a total of forty participants, when we received over 140 nominations we raised the number somewhat, allowing for THRAB members and Archives Summit Committee members, tilting toward a total of 75 participants in all. Letters from Secretary Darnell went out to all invitees in June and responses are due back in my office by July 15.

The Road from Here

Now the hard part begins. In order for the Archives Summit to produce a set of realistic, practical, and meaningful recommendations, we must enter the Summit with clear ideas of the focus of the discussions. In short, we are developing a set of recommendations to submit to the Summit attendees, to be considered first by the various breakout groups and then by all attendees in a final plenary session. Toward this end we are soliciting recommendations from all interested persons, and especially from the members of the Society of Tennessee

Archivists. For background information on the issues to be addressed, please see my paper "Toward an Archives Infrastructure in Tennessee Counties," which appeared as a supplement to this publication earlier this year, and in abbreviated format in the last issue of the Secretary of State's *Quarterly*.

Please use the accompanying Archives Summit Conference Recommendation Form (or a reasonable likeness thereof) and submit as many recommendations as you like to me **c/o Archives Summit, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 7th Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37243-0312**. You may also fax them to my office at **(615) 532-9293** or e-mail them to me at: **egleaves@mail.state.tn.us**.

All recommendations will then be transmitted to, and discussed by, the Tennessee Historical Records Advisory Board and the Archives Summit Committee, in their upcoming meetings in late July and early August. Please submit your recommendations **as soon as possible**.

Great Expectations

I have great expectations for the Archives Summit in Tennessee, perhaps exaggerated ones, but "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp/Or what's a heaven for?" With careful planning, believe that we will carry from this historic working conference a vision and a momentum that will serve the archival programs of this state well as we move into the twenty-first century.

*Edwin S. Gleaves
State Librarian & Archivist*

HOLLARS TO RETIRE AT TSLA

After service of thirty-seven years, Gene Hollars, Director of the Restoration and Reproduction Section, plans to retire at the State Library and Archives on June 30, 1998. His imminent departure is received with mixed emotions by his friends and colleagues who have had the good fortune to know and work with him over the years. On the positive side is the opportunity for him to devote time to a lot of activities and special interests which have had to take a back seat until now.

If one were to enumerate the contributions of Hollars as a TSLA staff member, it would include mention of his dedication to work, loyalty to his supervisors and one who contributed to the over-all well being of the agency through his ability to see the large picture and thus work for the good of the organization above all else.

Part of this work ethic can be attributed to the variety of work with which he has been associated in several phases of the archives program and with assistance and support from a number of former staff members including Walter Jordan and Horace Blades. His passion has been for improving and upgrading the archival program which has involved the preservation of records through the Local Government Records Microfilming Program which began during the early 1960's. Although the microfilming program would be affected by budget reductions over the years, Hollars continued to believe that this program should be continued and thus the renewal of the program in 1994 by the Tennessee General Assembly served to justify his support of this preservation effort. His interest and contacts with officials in the Genealogical Society of Utah was a major factor in the negotiation of the agreement between the Society and the Tennessee State Library and Archives in the Loose Records Microfilming Program.

Hollars has served as a major advisor to the State Librarian and Archivist on a great number of

issues. His work in budget analysis and preparation has had a significant impact on all phases of programs at the State Library and Archives. This type of work was especially useful in the establishment of the Tennessee Historical Records Advisory Board which was reappointed by the Governor in 1988. As a regular member of the TSLA In-House Committee he has shaped the tone and direction of this important records group. As a regular member of the Archives Review Committee he has worked to improve the interaction between the Archives and the Records Management Division which for a number of years was a major problem area in the management and preservation of state government agency records.

Above and beyond all these official activities, Hollars is a people person who is effective in working with individuals, in understanding their problems and in offering advice on dealing with both official and non-official matters. He has been a personal friend of this writer for years. I shall miss our daily conversations and our discussions about gardening, sports and such matters. Although he will no longer be physically present at the State Library and Archives, I know that if I have a problem and need to talk to someone he will take time to give counsel and advice as he has in the past. Thanks for all you have done for so many people for these many years. Enjoy your retirement but do keep in touch with your many friends.

*John H. Thweatt,
Tennessee State Library and Archives*

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

ASSISTANT STATE ARCHIVIST

Tennessee State Library and Archives
Nashville, Tennessee

Experienced administrator to assume responsibility for archival programs of the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Duties: Develop programs for the creation and funding of archives and historical records repositories statewide; work for feasible solutions to the use and preservation of electronic records for state and local government; administer grant programs; oversee archival processing and acquisition programs of the Tennessee State Library and Archives; assume active role in activities of the Tennessee Historical Records Advisory Board. Frequent travel.

Required: Advanced degree in history or related field; five years archival experience, including responsible administrative experience. Preferred: Knowledge of electronic media and telecommunications technology; Certified Archivist course of study.

Salary: \$4,500-4,800 monthly, plus full state benefits.

More information is available on the Internet at <http://www.state.tn.us/sos/statelib>.

Applications are accepted until this position is filled. Please send letter, resumé, and list of references to Edwin S. Gleaves, Tennessee State Library & Archives, 403 7th Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37243-0312. Inquiries welcomed at egleaves@mail.state.tn.us.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Summer is upon us once again. To the rest of the world this season is a time for slowing down, taking that vacation, going to that ballgame, having that picnic, going fishing. In the world of archives however, summer is one of our most hectic seasons. A large section of those people on vacation seem to want to spend at least part of their down time working on family history. All that spring cleaning has uncovered piles of photographs, letters and other assorted materials too good to throw out, so lets see if the archives wants them.



Even on a quiet college campus, things can get lively during the summer. In addition to a few term papers and graduate thesis being researched at any given time, out of town genealogists, alumni and scholars also keep me awake and alert. The quiet time of summer also gives records clerks in various offices across campus the chance to box up their non-active files to send over to archives. I am not complaining mind you. I wouldn't have a job if it weren't for

these people. Still, it would be nice if they would spread it out a bit over the rest of the year.

Setting up the Fall Conference at Rugby has been an ongoing project this summer. Anyone who wishes to present a paper at this years meeting should contact me. The earlier the better. So far the meeting is shaping up to be excellent. There will be sessions on appraisal, disaster planning and archives and memory. Tours of Historic Rugby, live music and special surprise guest will also be featured. You will be receiving an information packet in the mail in the next month or so. Please plan on attending.

There is good news from Murfreesboro. Dr. Jim Neal has agreed to stay on at the Gore Research Center for one more year. He had originally planned to retire at the end of this fiscal year. Dr. Neal reports that things still look favorable for the Archival Education Program that he has been working on. There is a need for institutional support from STA members for this program. This support needs to be in the form of placement for program interns. Interns will be expected to work at least 160 hours. It would help sell the program to both administrators and students if the interns could be paid. If you have any interest in hosting an intern at your archives, regardless of whether you can afford to pay them or not, please contact Dr. Neal. The more support that the archives profession shows for this program, the greater the likelihood that it will become a reality. Dr Neal can be reached at:

Albert Gore Research Center
 Middle Tennessee State University
 Box 198
 Murfreesboro, TN 37132
 e-mail: jhneal@mtsu.edu
 Phone: (615) 898-2632

Enjoy your summer. I look forward to seeing you at Rugby.

*Mancil Johnson,
 President, STA*

LINCOLN DOCUMENTS FOUND

Two amateur historians systematically sifting through 80,000 rarely touched files at the National Archives have found 570 documents with Abraham Lincoln's distinctive signature, a find that historians are calling extraordinary and the largest of its kind in 50 years. Tom and Beverly Lowry, working at their own expense, have indexed more than 40,000 of the Civil War courts-martial of Union soldiers, an undertaking begun but abandoned by others in the past. The Lincoln signatures were often squeezed in at the bottom of a general's lengthy report with a notation saying the soldier should be pardoned. The find tends to document the widely held belief that Lincoln was an unusually compassionate man. The discovery of such a huge number of Lincoln signatures is a surprise to Lincoln experts who said the prevailing belief had been that there weren't any left to find.

Thomas E. Schwartz, Illinois state historian and editor of the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, said, "Anything written in Lincoln's own hand is a major find." Cullom Davis, editor of the definitive collection of Lincoln's papers from his 25 years as a trial lawyer, said: "No American, or even any international figure, has been more intensely studied or described in more biographies. Scholars have spent generations plowing all available and known sources. . . . To find almost 600 Lincoln signatures is truly newsworthy."

The Lowry's discovered that just hours before the Lincoln's left the White House for Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865, the president pardoned Pvt. Patrick Murphy, who was described as "idiotic or insane" and had been charged with desertion. Lincoln scrawled at the bottom of the reports sent to him on Murphy's court-martial, "This man is pardoned and hereby ordered to be discharged from the service." He signed it, "A. Lincoln." The Lowry's started their project on a part-time basis a year ago, spending several weeks at the Archives and then returning home to California. Recently they bought a house in Woodbridge and are spending 40 hours a week at the repository for federal records.

Tom Lowry, 65, is a retired psychiatrist, and his wife, Beverly, 53, had worked as a hospital insurance administrator. They each handle the files, summarizing the contents and photocopying what they want to keep. Beverly Lowry does all the computer work, logging in the information. She calls herself "a loyal flunky." The work has proven to be an emotional experience for each of them. "The first Lincoln signature I found – and every one since – I burst into tears and had to push away from the table so not to smear it," said Beverly Lowry. "It is all so touching. He is dead and won't be writing his name anymore. . . . Here is a document he signed that I can hold."

The Lowry's aren't new to Civil War research or the court-martial files. They delved into them about 12 years ago, finding enough material there and in other archives to write a book on sex in the Civil War titled "The Story The Soldiers Wouldn't Tell." They were drawn back to the files, knowing that there were many thousands more than they had studied for the book, which was published in 1995.

Michael Musick, Civil War specialist at the Archives, said other researchers had spent a few weeks working with the files but had given up because of the confusing system used by federal clerks in the 1860s, a system that he said was roughly chronological.

The Lowry's found that a man charged with rape would get no mercy from his president. However, rape wasn't the only crime that could mean a death sentence to a soldier. Theft, desertion, drunkenness, sleeping on duty as well as murder could result in a sentence of hanging or death by a firing squad. For most crimes, Lincoln would give the man a second chance. Tom Lowry said some cases that reached Lincoln did not involve a death sentence. Dr. George New, the 7th Indiana Regiment surgeon, sold the hospital's supply of whiskey to soldiers because he couldn't transport it. He was accused of pocketing the money, although he testified he had tried to give it to regiment officers. The court-martial resulted in his dismissal.

Lincoln replied: "I am not satisfied with this sentence in this case, so far as it dismisses the accused from the service. That he sold liquor is unquestionable, but that he did so with any improper intention, or that he ever intended to appropriate the proceeds, I think is not proven. I therefore wish to restore him, if it is lawful for me to do so."

The Lowry's are willing to discuss only a few of the Lincoln-related files they have found, saving a complete report for a March 28 symposium organized by the Library of Congress and the Abraham Lincoln Institute of the Mid-Atlantic. Musick said the Lowry's and any others who use the Archives for research are free to publish their findings. "We are pleased with their work," he said. "We think it's wonderful, and we encourage researchers to work with our files. That is the only way things will be better known."

Linda Wheeler
c/o Peter A. Kurilecz CRM, CA
Woodside Summit Group, Inc.
Richmond, Va.
Kurilecz_PA@vdot.state.va.us

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DAVID SOWELL, EDITOR
c/o TENNESSEE STATE LIBRARY & ARCHIVES
TECHNICAL SERVICES SECTION
403 SEVENTH AVE. NORTH
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0312

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Mark Your Calendars!

**SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE ARCHIVISTS
1998 Fall Meeting
Historic Rugby
in Morgan County,
Tennessee**

November 4-6, 1998

for information contact:

Mancil Johnson, President, STA
Tennessee Technological University
Box 5066

Cookeville, TN 38505

(931) 372-3537

email: mjohnson@tntech.edu