

# James Harold Easterby, 1898-1960

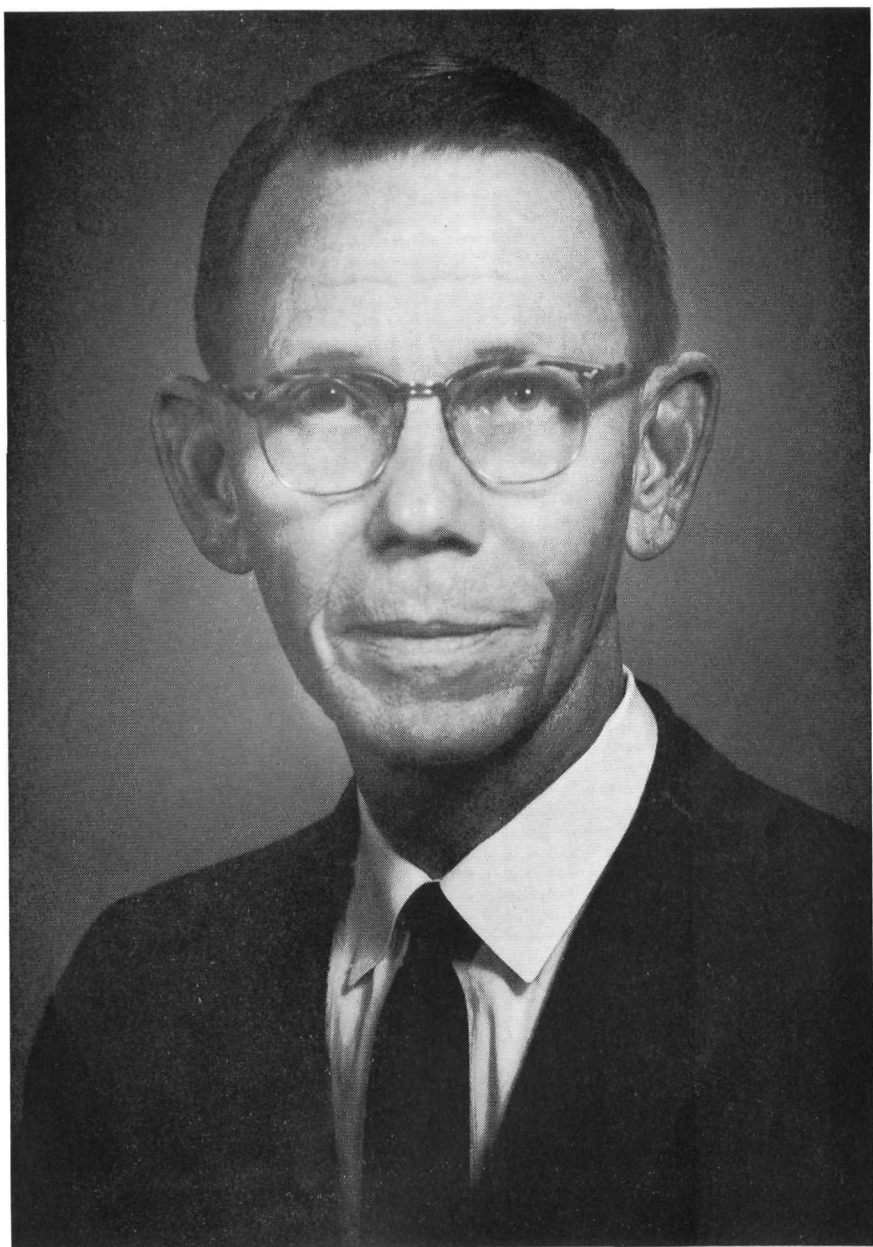
By W. EDWIN HEMPHILL

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**J**AMES HAROLD EASTERBY, a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists since 1958, died on December 29, 1960. For almost three months he had been on leave from his arduous duties as Director of the South Carolina Archives Department; but for only two weeks had his illness been considered critical.

Harold Easterby was a historian first, an archivist second. Few members of the Society have ever found these two careers more logically united, so beneficial mutually. As a historian, he demonstrated the instincts of an archivist; and when he became an archivist, he remained a historian. By living observantly and by learning both formally and informally, he became preeminent in his understanding of his native South Carolina's development. He was graduated from the College of Charleston in 1920, and in the same year he began to teach there. From 1923 until 1949 he was the college's professor of history, from 1937 also the director of its library. It spared his talents and industriousness only enough to enable him to earn graduate degrees—his Master's from Harvard, 1922; his Doctor's from Chicago, 1945. To these the College added the D. Litt. in 1960.

Meanwhile, the maturing historian had also been contributing to Clio's cause as author, bibliographer, and editor. He wrote the bicentennial history of the St. Andrew's Society of Charleston (1929), the sesquicentennial history of the College of Charleston (1935), and articles on South Carolina history for such publications as the *Dictionary of American Biography* and the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. He compiled a comprehensive *Guide to the Study and Reading of South Carolina History*; it consists of two volumes subtitled *Topical Lists* (1949) and *A General, Classified Bibliography* (1950). He edited the South Carolina Historical Association's annual *Proceedings*, 1931-33 and 1944-45; the South Carolina Historical Society's quarterly *Magazine*, 1941-48; *The South Carolina Rice Plantation . . .* (1945); and *Wadboo Barony . . .* (1952). A consistent characteristic plainly visible in these publications is their emphasis upon primary source materials. No Southern



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scholar whom I have known dedicated his life more actively to the printing of basic documents as a prerequisite to the writing of authentic history.

That sense of mission was a chief factor that led the Charlestonian to Columbia in 1949. The basic documents that called him to the capital were governmental, scattered rather than fully assembled, rich indeed in content but largely unexplored. The State's archival agency had been making some progress through half a century as a Historical Commission, but the fact that it had never attained an annual budget as high as \$10,000 is one measure of the remaining need.

In his quiet, persuasive way Harold Easterby achieved revolutionary transformations. The agency became the State's Archives Department in name and in service. The official manuscripts given proper care were multiplied fully tenfold; so was the budget. Inventorying, microfilming, and laminating programs were adopted. Research workers began to discover treasures previously unavailable. And at last, in 1960, South Carolina's first building designed specifically for the preservation of the archives began to serve well both the records and the public. Had Dr. Easterby attempted in that year to bring up to date his description of "The Archives of South Carolina" in the July 1952 issue of this journal, his self-effacing modesty would have been strained severely.

Distinctive among this historian-archivist's policies was his continuing concern for the distribution of basic records in printed form. Few State archival agencies, if any, have shown equal vigor during the past decade—and doubtless none under equal handicaps—in their publication programs. One volume that Harold Easterby had planned appeared just a week before his death, although he did not know that; the texts of five more volumes were then in various stages of printer's proofs, two of them under his own editorship. He had himself placed the capstone in the arch of this program of documentary publication: his editing of the *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, 1736-1747*, in seven volumes (1951-58), has been repeatedly acclaimed as a model. By his own public confession, that was the "favorite" work of an inspiring personality who befriended both history and archives. It remains as obviously a printed monument to a meticulous but gentle and beloved scholar as the new building constitutes unintentionally a physical monument to a useful and respected public servant.