

Manuscript Collections at Stephen F. Austin State College

By ROBERT S. MAXWELL*

THE manuscript collections at Stephen F. Austin State College are of two types. There are papers, diaries, and a few rare books dealing with the early history of Texas. There are also collections of business records. Of the two the latter are by far the more numerous.

Among the materials denoted as early Texana, perhaps the most significant is the Robert B. Blake collection. Blake was a tireless researcher and translator and for many years a court reporter for the Nacogdoches District. His translations and typescripts comprise some 93 volumes of material concerning East Texas from the Bexar and Nacogdoches Archives (Spanish Texas). I understand that a copy of this set is held by the University of Texas Library.

There are a number of files of personal papers of Texans of local prominence. Perhaps the most important are the papers of the Reverend George L. Crocket, longtime Episcopal clergyman in East Texas and local historian and collector. His papers contain many significant items not included in his *Two Centuries in East Texas*, but they have not yet been completely cataloged. Mr. Crocket also prepared a calendar of all Texas items appearing in *Niles' Weekly Register*, 1811 through 1849. This is a most useful aid for students of the Texas Revolution and the Republic.

The manuscript collections also include a fairly considerable number of land certificates, Confederate muster rolls and pension items, and papers concerning the history of Texas families. More than 22,000 items have been donated by D.A.R. chapters and individuals. There are also some early maps, a good file of early Texas almanacs, newspapers (many on microfilm), and some rare books. These materials are housed in a special East Texas Room, which

* The author is professor of history and director of regional research at Stephen F. Austin State College, Nacogdoches, Tex. This paper was read before the Society of American Archivists on Oct. 9, 1964, at Austin, as part of a session of the Society's 28th annual meeting concerning manuscript collections in the Southwest. Chester V. Kielman, Archivist, University of Texas Library, was session chairman.

is well furnished and equipped (thanks to gifts from the D.A.R.), has its own catalog of holdings, and is staffed by two ladies who are quite knowledgeable about the resources of the collection and most helpful to the many researchers, chiefly local residents who seek information concerning their family history.

From this summary it is doubtless apparent that here is a small but respectable manuscript center and rare book room containing a number of records of local and general interest. No doubt these holdings are duplicated or approximated in many of the State educational institutions of Texas.

The business history collection is something else again. It is vast, sprawling, only partially cataloged, and still growing. The library is listed as an Official Forest History Repository, one of only three in the Gulf Southwest. The others are at Louisiana State University, whose holdings are considerably larger than ours, and the University of Texas, whose holdings apparently are somewhat smaller.

Stephen F. Austin State College is located in the deep East Texas county and town of Nacogdoches. This is "piney woods" country, and its forests are refreshing to the visitor from the plains or prairies. Less than a hundred years ago the forests were even more dense. The majestic longleaf pines, described as towering 200 feet in the air and as much as 5 feet in diameter, were virtually untouched. This was the sight that greeted the veteran lumbermen from the Lake States and the East who went west and south looking for new sources of timber as the white pine forests of the North neared exhaustion at the turn of the century.

There ensued a great "timber rush" to Texas and the Gulf Southwest. Though neither Weyerhaeuser nor Stephenson operated as far south as Texas, there were others almost equally prominent who became identified with Texas lumbering. For example, the Long-Bell Co., reputed to be operators of the largest sawmill in the world today, at Longview, Wash., was one of the largest landholders and lumber manufacturers in Texas before the depression of 1929. Another operator, William Carlisle, cut his way through a succession of pine forests from Wisconsin, to Arkansas, to Texas, and thence to the Pacific coast, his trail marked by a series of abandoned sawmill towns all bearing the same peculiar name—Onalaska. Some lumbermen, such as the Frosts and the Pickerings, operated about equal areas in Louisiana and Texas. A few, such as Henry Lutcher, Joseph Kurth, and T. L. L. Temple, moved to Texas, remained and became identified with the local scene, and

still operate large lumber manufacturing companies. A few men, such as John Henry Kirby, the Thompsons, and W. T. Carter, were native Texans who recognized the opportunity and shared in the great bonanza of Texas lumbering between 1880 and 1930.

All these and others built what were virtually feudal baronies in the East Texas piney woods. Their holdings included land (measured by hundred thousand acres), multiple sawmills, company towns, common carrier railroads, and often significant retail and export establishments. These companies were the dominant industry in the entire region, the principal employers of labor, and by far the largest taxpayers for half a century. Collectively between 1880 and 1930 the lumber companies cut some 55 billion board feet of lumber from approximately 18 million acres, leaving the land largely denuded, the industry depressed, and thousands of workers unemployed. The history of the companies was largely the history of the East Texas region.

The records of these activities are well worth preserving. When I went to East Texas in the fall of 1952, not only were there no business record collections but there was no thought that any records could be made available or that such a collection would be desirable. Fortunately the administration of Stephen F. Austin State College was enthusiastic and set up a small budget for research through the Bureau of East Texas Research. The acquisition of manuscripts and other materials came slowly at first, then more rapidly as the late Ernest Kurth and later other lumber officials decided to deposit their early records with us. Fortunately the college completed a new library at this time, and adequate space on the third floor was allocated to the business history collections.

At present the business history collections at the college contain more than half a million items. Most of the materials deal with the lumber industry although there are many papers concerning East Texas railroads and a few items on other industries.

Among the major lumber manufacturers represented in these holdings are the Angelina County Lumber Co., the Foster Lumber Co., the Chronister Lumber Co., the Frost Lumber Industries, the Thompson family lumber companies, the Lutcher and Moore Lumber Co. (mostly photostats), the Henderson and Kurth Lumber Co., the St. Augustine Lumber Co., and the Newton County Lumber Co. There are also materials (mostly printed items and clippings) concerning the W. T. Carter Lumber Co., the Kirby Lumber Co., and the Temple lumber industries. In addition we have accumulated during the past 10 years an oral history

collection, ranging from transcribed tape recordings by many veteran employees of these lumber companies, to memoranda on visits and informal conversations, to depositions by several officials. Those interviewed include company officers and owners, persons of managerial rank, workers in the sawmills and in the woods (both retired and active), wives of sawmill employees, and even a company doctor. Together these interviews provide an interesting and revealing story of the internal history of sawmill life during the bonanza period.

The heart of the collection, and by far its largest component, is the Kurth papers. The late Ernest Kurth, Sr., was a second-generation lumber manufacturer who was president, chairman, or other official of a great complex of enterprises centered in and near Lufkin, Tex. His father, a German immigrant, had built the family fortunes from one small sawmill at Keltys beginning in 1887. His son, Ernest, continued to build and expand the empire, and the grandson, Ernest Kurth, Jr., now presides over an immense industrial empire including such diverse elements as the Angelina County Lumber Co., the Lufkin National Bank, the Southland Paper Mills, the Lufkin Foundry, and the Angelina and Neches River Railroad.

The records for almost the first half-century of this family business enterprise are deposited with the college library. When Ernest Kurth agreed to transfer the records, he gave all of them; he did not have his assistants cull or check through any of the papers. Consequently the entire business record is intact, and these papers provide a complete history of the company's growth and the activities of its leading officials in many fields from 1887 to 1930. Indeed there are scattered through the files many personal items that doubtless came to us by accident. In the indexing process we turned up, for example, a packet of love letters written by one of the company officials to his future wife. Needless to say we removed them from the collection and offered to return them to the writer, now an older man. He was both amused and appreciative.

Also scattered through the papers are many items dealing with political and civic affairs. The Kurths were leading Republicans during this entire period and helped to control Federal patronage in East Texas during the T. Roosevelt, Taft, Harding, and Coolidge eras. Joseph Kurth ran for the lieutenant-governorship of Texas in 1924, and much about that campaign found its way into the company files. There are many letters dealing with trade association policies, State legislation and proposed legislation, and

similar matters. In fact there is little of consequence that affected Texas or the United States that is not reflected in the correspondence in the files of the Kurth family.

The breakdown of the records of the Kurth papers is as follows. There are some 94 letterpress books containing copies of outgoing correspondence, 1887-1912. Although most of the early letters are in longhand, the books are in remarkably good condition and the letters are clearly legible. There are more than 850 Amberg file boxes of correspondence, incoming from 1887 to 1912 and both incoming and outgoing from then until 1930. There are nearly 100 boxes of invoices. There are more than 30 time books, ranging from pocket-size books carried by foremen to comprehensive employment records kept in the main office. There is an array of ledgers and journals, including more than 60 volumes of commissary records. There are also plats, maps, and field notes of land holdings. Finally, there are trivia such as scraps of paper asking the cashier to advance 50c or \$1 to the bearer.

The contents of the other company holdings duplicate and in some cases supplement the Kurth papers. The Frost papers, for example, contain a very complete record of employees and a full history of their employment. The Foster papers include a complete account of the purchase, construction, and cost of the Foster sawmill and its machinery. The Lucher and Moore papers contain a significant account of that company's export trade.

Largely with student help, we have cleaned, sorted, and partially indexed this great mass of business records. As there were and are no trained archivists or people with experience in processing business records on the college library staff, we proceeded as best we could. The indexing is incomplete and doubtless too thin in places. Possibly in some cases we indexed the wrong things. But we have preserved these important collections, we have thrown away virtually nothing, and we have kept the original chronological arrangement of the correspondence intact. Recently the college has provided adequate shelving to house the collection in two large, airy rooms with sufficient light and worktables to accommodate serious students.

It is the ambition of the college library to become a center for forest history and a research headquarters for those who wish to pursue studies in this area of business history. The college has the only school of forestry in Texas, and the U.S. Forest Service has a research office on the campus. These specialists naturally are interested in the acquisition and organization of lumbering records.

Nacogdoches County is almost in the center of the lumber industry that flourished during the bonanza period, of the new lumber industry of postwar years, which emphasizes selective cutting, and of the pulp and paper industry. Already one book is in progress; one M.A. thesis has been written by gleaning these materials, and at least two other theses are in progress. Several outside scholars have requested and been given permission to use the papers for independent research projects. It is the hope of the Bureau of East Texas Research, the librarians, and the administration that, as the facilities become better known, more companies will see fit to deposit their records with us and many more scholars will find it useful to examine our holdings. Both will find a warm welcome and helpful assistance.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT COURSE

The American Records Management Association is offering a 15-session correspondence course on Records Management. Subjects covered include: Forms and Reports Management, Records Retention, Records Centers, Vital Records, Microfilm, and Files and Correspondence Management. Lecture notes, glossaries, reference materials, and written assignments are provided for each session. An official "ARMA Certificate of Completion" is presented at the end of the course. The fee of \$75 includes all materials and a copy of the "ARMA Workshop on Records Management." (ARMA National Headquarters, 738 Builders Exchange, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402.)