

THE FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
NOVEMBER 11 AND 12, 1940

THE special occasion for holding the fourth annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Montgomery, Alabama, was the dedication of the Archival Section of the World War Memorial Building. Twice before the Society had convened in state capitals where new buildings had recently been provided for the archives: in Springfield, Illinois, in 1938, and Annapolis, Maryland, in 1939. The meeting in Montgomery, however, was also an occasion to pay tribute to the memory of Dr. Thomas McAdory Owen, pioneer in the field of state archives in the United States and founder of the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

In view of the place of meeting, it seemed appropriate to the program committee¹ to place some emphasis upon special problems relating to archives in the South and their value in the writing of southern history. Since such problems involve matters of common interest to the historian and the archivist, several historians were invited to contribute to the discussion. Their observations served to stress certain points regarding the location and accessibility of archival materials for the individual or private research worker and to indicate the close relationship between archives and historical manuscript collections. Historians and scholars in many other fields may find increasing difficulty in keeping abreast of the rapid developments in archives, where much of the raw material for research is preserved; and archivists will profit by frequent arguments and discussions with these users of their records.

The first session, held on Monday morning, November 11, in the Jefferson Davis Hotel, was devoted to Agricultural Records of the South, with Mr. James E. Ward, Jr., of Clemson College presiding. The opening paper on "Extension Service Records in Alabama," by Mr. Charles S. Davis of Alabama Polytechnic Institute, described co-operative extension work as an outgrowth of farmers' institutes

¹ Composed of Miss Suda L. Bane and Messrs. James Brewster, David L. Darden, George M. McFarland, Howard Peckham, Theodore R. Schellenberg, Philip C. Brooks, ex officio, and Lester J. Cappon, chairman.

and farmers' co-operative demonstration work, leading to the Smith-Lever Act of Congress in 1914. Agricultural extension records in Alabama prior to 1920 were destroyed by fire at Auburn in that year and only a few remain in the Bureau of Plant Industry in Washington and in the National Archives. However, the records since 1920 are complete at Auburn and in the office of the Negro field agent for the southern states at Tuskegee Institute. Mr. Davis emphasized the value of much of this material for the student of agricultural history, particularly the annual reports and correspondence of the director, because the director's office is, to some extent, a clearing house between the United States Department of Agriculture and the farmers of the state. The second paper of this session was given by Mr. Theodore R. Schellenberg of the National Archives on "Federal Records on Cotton Growing." He presented an historical survey of the evolution of these records in relation to the fluctuations in cotton production and the ever-expanding activity of the federal government in attempting to solve the economic and scientific problems of this staple crop. Records of the United States government pertaining to cotton growing fall into two main periods. The first covers the years 1839-1861, resulting from agricultural activities of the Patent Office. They are preserved in the library of the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., and in the National Archives. Few materials are extant from the Civil War until 1889 when the Bureau of Agriculture was made an independent administrative department. The second important period covers the years from 1889 to the present, resulting from the activities of the Department of Agriculture in investigating the methods of combating insect pests, particularly the cotton boll weevil, in developing a system of farm management through farmers' co-operative demonstration work, and in improving methods of marketing through establishment of cotton standards and promotion of co-operative marketing. Mr. Schellenberg identified and described the more important groups of records in the various subdivisions of the department in Washington and in some of the southern states; and among the materials transferred to the National Archives he mentioned those pertaining to Seaman A. Knapp's contributions to southern agriculture.

"Twentieth Century Agricultural Problems Revealed in Archives" was the subject of the third paper, given by Mr. Everett E. Edwards of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture. He pointed out that the agricultural revolution, as a

part of the industrial revolution in this country, especially since 1865, and the last phase of the westward movement marking the end of the public domain must be regarded as fundamental to an understanding of such major problems as the wasteful exploitation of our natural resources, the spread of tenancy, the growth of economic efficiency, and destruction of the cohesiveness of the agricultural community by the automobile. In attempting to solve these problems by means of agricultural extension work, farm demonstration, etc., the United States Department of Agriculture has placed primary emphasis upon economic rather than social factors. Mr. Edwards mentioned numerous groups of important noncurrent records which are now in the National Archives, but he suggested that the more pressing agricultural problems can be studied best in the current or semi-current files retained by the department. He also raised the pertinent question as to what extent matters of policy, frequently decided by telephone conversation, are recorded in archives. In conclusion he praised the work of the Federal Archives Survey in bringing to light much material in the field offices of the Department of Agriculture and he urged the state agricultural colleges, as links between the states and the federal government, to become more conscious of their records. The discussion which followed the three papers revealed genuine interest in the custody and accessibility of agricultural archives and in their significance to both the archivist and the historian.

At the luncheon conference Monday noon archivists and historians had an opportunity to discuss their common interests in Archival Materials of the Civil War and Reconstruction and what might be done to make the growing mass of hitherto untouched material more usable. Mr. R. H. Woody of Duke University presided. The first two papers, treating the Civil War period, were prepared by scholars who have been persistent pioneers in the location of original materials, often in spite of the indifference of the custodian rather than with his aid. Miss Ella Lonn of Goucher College gave an entertaining and informative survey of archival institutions from Washington, D.C., to Texas in which she found valuable sources for her research on various aspects of the Confederacy. The archivists were so hospitable that, in some cases, they permitted her to work in solitude after regular hours and on holidays. The time lost and the difficulties encountered in some places, however, suggest the great advantage of the guides to manuscripts and the inventories of archives which the Historical Records Survey is publishing. Miss Lonn also urged greater

centralization of newspaper collections and a project for indexing the more important files. The second paper was prepared by Lieutenant Colonel William M. Robinson, Jr., on "Confederate Judicial Records," and, in his absence, read by Mr. Edwin A. Davis of Louisiana State University. Colonel Robinson set out on his quest fifteen years ago when no published bibliography or list existed to show whether the Confederate court records had survived. Traveling back and forth across the area of the old Confederacy to visit district court and post office buildings, he experienced more thrills in discovering buried treasures, sometimes to the embarrassment of the custodian, than disappointments because the search proved fruitless. So thorough was Colonel Robinson's search for these records that few items listed later by the Federal Archives Survey were unknown to him.² His exciting travel account indicates the limitations of the "armchair historian's" research. "Should these Confederate records be centralized in the National Archives or maintained *in situ*?" he asked. This is a question worthy of serious consideration by archivists.

Mr. Curtis W. Garrison of the Hayes Memorial Library spoke next on archival materials of the Reconstruction period, interpreting the term broadly to include the years to about 1890. The revisionists have been very active in research on this period, a field in which it is difficult to attain even a fair degree of objectivity. A heavy responsibility falls upon the archivist to make the bulk of original manuscript materials on this period accessible. Dunning and his disciples relied chiefly on printed sources and a few manuscript collections, especially the Andrew Johnson Papers. The younger group of historians, writing since 1925, have searched farther afield in the use of manuscripts and archives, but much of the latter material is only beginning to be listed and made easily accessible. "What will the student do with all this? He has not well used the dozen or so of imperfect lists long available. . . . It is certain that historians of the Reconstruction period need more assistance in locating the materials they seek, unless they abandon all pretense at covering their sources. To do this," Mr. Garrison suggested, "the controls must do two things: (1) keep them posted by a current key guide; (2) assist them to select according to the law of diminishing returns."

The last speaker, Mr. Francis E. Simkins of State Teachers College, Farmville, Virginia, suggested certain attitudes which should

² His *Justice-in-Grey*, a history of the Confederate courts, will be published by the Harvard University Press early in 1941.

aid collectors of Reconstruction materials toward a newer approach to the problems of the period. "Fresh materials," he said, "do not have the most adequate significance unless set in a framework of new ideas." He asked for comparison of Reconstruction events in the South with those of other areas and periods; an understanding of the psychological reasons why the South resented Radical Reconstruction; emphasis on other than political aberrations; the questioning of the thesis that Reconstruction was too comprehensive in its radicalism; a discussion of white counterrevolutionary aggressiveness; and the development of social, educational, religious, and commercial reform during the period as constructive agencies of a reordered social life.

The program to dedicate the archival section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building was held on Monday afternoon in this beautiful edifice located on the Capitol Square. Chief Justice Lucien D. Gardner of the Alabama Supreme Court presided in the absence of Governor Frank M. Dixon, who was out of the city. This program was in every respect a tribute to the great work of the late Dr. Thomas M. Owen. Judge Gardner in his introductory remarks recalled his personal friendship with Dr. Owen, whose lovable character, keen mind, and great ambition for the archives of Alabama will be long remembered. Judge Gardner then introduced Mrs. Marie B. Owen, who gave the address of welcome on behalf of the state of Alabama and the Department of Archives and History. She spoke of Dr. Owen's early interest in the historical records of the state, his distress over the indifference with which they were generally regarded, and his dream which became a reality when the Department of Archives was established. Mrs. Owen expressed deep pleasure and gratification that the Society of American Archivists should be meeting in Montgomery on this occasion and giving official recognition to Alabama's part in archival development in the United States. Since Mr. Thomas M. Owen, Jr., of the National Archives could not be present to reply on behalf of the Society, Mr. Waldo G. Leland, permanent secretary of the American Council of Learned Societies and president of the Society of American Archivists, gave the response. Mr. Leland also recalled his pleasant and helpful acquaintance with Dr. Owen on a visit to Montgomery many years ago and declared that no place in the United States could be more appropriate for this Society to meet than Montgomery, where the trail had been blazed for future archivists. He expressed his apprecia-

tion of the fine work which Mrs. Owen has done as her husband's successor and extended the thanks of the Society for the opportunity to convene in the capital of Alabama.

The dedication address³ was given by Mr. R. D. W. Connor, archivist of the United States. He regarded the Alabama Department of Archives and History in a very real sense as "but the lengthened shadow of a man's life." He sketched the early years of Thomas M. Owen—his training in law and success as a lawyer; his three years of government service in Washington where he spent his spare time on historical research in the Library of Congress and gained much by his friendly relations with the librarian, Dr. Ainsworth R. Spofford; his return to Alabama where he deserted law for history, dug into the old records which he found shamefully neglected and deteriorated, and planned and carried through his campaign for state archival organization, culminating in the act of 1901 providing for a Department of Archives and History. Mr. Connor then outlined the steady growth of this department under Dr. Owen's inspiring leadership and pointed out how his work was emulated in many other states, including North Carolina, to which Mr. Connor referred from personal experience. The idea of the present Memorial Building of Alabama was expressed in an act of 1919 and the early planning for it was done by a commission of which Dr. Owen was the executive officer until his death in March, 1920.

Mr. William D. McCain of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History followed Mr. Connor with a paper on "The Development of Archival Institutions in Alabama and the South." Mr. McCain traced the development of the Alabama Department of Archives and History since its establishment in 1901 and showed the influence of Dr. Owen in the evolution of archival institutions in the South. The first state to follow the example of Alabama was Mississippi; later, in chronological order, came North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, Georgia, and Louisiana. The prospects for archival legislation in Florida were also discussed. Mr. McCain concluded with the inquiry: "Are we now, with the aid of federal funds for buildings and federal projects, such as the Historical Records Survey, experiencing a renaissance in southern archivology?" At the conclusion of the program, Mrs. Owen introduced the members of her staff to the visitors and invited them to inspect every section of the Memorial Building.

³ This address will appear in an early number of THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST.

The dinner session at the Jefferson Davis Hotel Monday evening was concerned with Administrative History of Governmental Agencies in Relation to Archives. Mr. James W. Moffitt of the Oklahoma Historical Society presided. In presenting his paper on "Administrative History and Federal Archives," Mr. Karl L. Trever of the National Archives pointed out that no real study of the American administrative system was made before 1904; and that now the National Archives is the responsible central institution of the federal government charged with the collection, preservation, and preparation of materials for the study and writing of our administrative history. This subject is a necessary part of the culture and training of an archivist and a tool prepared by the archivist to facilitate the use of his records. The intensive study of administrative history implies the existence of available source materials. In this connection, it may be discussed from three points of view: (1) a study of agencies by use of printed sources external to their records; (2) a study of agencies by an examination of the physical arrangement of the records they produce; (3) a study of these bodies by reference to the informational content of their files. Mr. Trever stressed the point that a knowledge of administrative history is by no means the sole requisite for any phase of archival practice. The archivist also needs imagination, judgment, and common sense, and he must not be interested in administrative history as an end in itself. The scholar will find that a knowledge of this subject is a means of controlling research data.

The second paper, on "Administrative History in Relation to State Archives," by Mr. Dan Lacy of the Historical Records Survey, Washington, D.C., dealt with procedures used by the HRS in research in administrative history for the preparation of inventories of state archives. State constitutions, session laws, and codes are searched for acts or provisions affecting the structure, organization, functions, and procedure of all state agencies; judicial decisions, attorney-general's rulings, federal and colonial statutes are examined; periodic reports, administrative orders, manuals of procedure, etc., are studied; and present or recent officials are interviewed. As state agencies become more complex, a study of nonlegal sources is more necessary for an adequate understanding of these agencies' administrative history. Mr. Lacy stated that the findings resulting from this research, in the form of a card index-abstract file and in essays on each agency prefacing the published inventory of its archives, would be available to the state archivist in each state for use in arrangement,

classification, and reference. The third paper of this session, prepared by Mr. George M. McFarland, also of the Historical Records Survey, Washington, D.C., on "Administrative History in Relation to Local Archives," was read, in his absence, by Mr. John C. L. Andreassen of the New Orleans office of the HRS. Here again archivists may profit by the thorough work of this nation-wide WPA project. Legal material of the kind listed in the preceding paper, has provided a rich source of data for the construction of a frame of reference for local administrative history because state legislatures regulate in detail the operation of county government. However, administrative history compiled solely from legal materials would be idealized, Mr. McFarland pointed out, since frequently laws were ignored or incompletely executed. Consequently it is imperative to study also various monographs, debates of state constitutional conventions, and reports of legislative committees. These materials in turn have serious limitations. Therefore it is necessary to focus the knowledge from all these sources upon an analysis of the records themselves in order to provide a true picture of administrative history as well as to prepare useful guides to archives.

Shortly after the adjournment of this session the annual business meeting of the Society was held. The matter-of-fact procedure of business was greatly enlivened by President Leland's witticisms and repartee. The report of the secretary, Mr. Philip C. Brooks, showed further growth of the Society's membership, though not so rapid as during the preceding year, sketched the work of various committees, and expressed well deserved commendation of THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST'S high calibre under the editorship of Mr. Theodore C. Pease. The secretary also read the report of the treasurer, Mr. Julian P. Boyd, who was unable to attend the meeting. After his report was approved, resolutions were adopted in appreciation of the cordial hospitality extended to the Society by Mrs. Marie B. Owen and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, by other state officials and local organizations, and for the work done by the committee on local arrangements and the program committee. After report of the nominating committee, the following officers were elected: Mr. Waldo G. Leland, president; Mr. Herbert A. Kellar, vice-president; Mr. Philip C. Brooks, secretary; Mr. Julian P. Boyd, treasurer; and Mr. Morris L. Radoff to the council.

The subject of the morning session held in the Paramount Theatre on November 12 was Famous Personalities Revealed in Archival

Records. Miss Winnie Allen of the University of Texas was chairman. She introduced first Mr. Nelson M. Blake who, in the absence of Mr. S. F. Riepma of the National Archives, read his paper on "A Soldier-Archivist and His Records: Major General Fred C. Ainsworth." Mr. Riepma depicted Ainsworth as the organizing genius responsible for the creation of the old War Department Record and Pension Office, the abolishing in most War Department branches of the old letterbook system of correspondence, the instituting of the so-called index record-card system of keeping personal military histories, and for many other administrative reforms in this field. His career both as a surgeon in the army and as a War Department executive, culminating in his tenure of the adjutant generalcy, exemplifies the advantages as well as the dangers of highly centralized archival control, and throws light on the influence of personality on the history of any group of archives. Most of the drastic reforms, however, which Ainsworth made in the department archives, affecting mainly the Civil War records, were in turn outmoded. The second paper was given by Mr. Lewis J. Darter, Jr., on "Federal Archives Relating to Matthew Fontaine Maury." These are the records accumulated by the United States Naval Observatory and Hydrographical Office during Maury's superintendency, 1842-1861, and now preserved in the National Archives. They comprise two principal groups: general correspondence and the logs and abstract logs from which Maury's wind and current charts were compiled. These records are particularly important for studies of the administrative history of the agency over which Maury presided; for information relating to the far-flung activities in which he was interested, and for biographical studies of Maury himself; and, most significant, for the light thrown on the wind and current charts, economic, social, and political conditions of the times, and especially on maritime history. Following Mr. Darter's paper, the audience was entertained with a movie "short" based on the life of Maury.

Mr. Herbert A. Kellar of the McCormick Historical Association presided at the luncheon conference in the Jefferson Davis Hotel on Archival Administration. Because of an unusual delay in transportation service, Mr. Christopher B. Coleman of the Indiana State Library could not arrive in time for this session. In his place, Mr. C. C. Crittenden of the North Carolina Historical Commission kindly consented to speak on "Some Problems of State Archival Administration." He emphasized five points which every state archivist may well

consider. First, the centralization of the archives under one organization is desirable and facilitates the winning of official recognition which is necessary in promoting essential archival legislation. Second, the public must be educated through the press, radio, and patriotic societies to an awareness of archival service which is available to them and to an interest in aiding in the preservation of records. An historical museum, in connection with the archives, and historical publications are advantageous to public relations. The third point, on financing archival work, follows directly from success in gaining popular support which will help to obtain larger legislative appropriations. Fourth, the state archives should make full use of and support such WPA projects as affect its fields of activity, especially the Historical Records Survey. The archivist can assist in finding the necessary local sponsors for these projects and in organizing and motivating historical and advisory committees. Fifth, we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the growing accumulation of records. Formerly, only preservation was considered, but we must formulate policies and act wisely in destroying certain records as well as in preserving others.

Mr. Crittenden's stimulating address led to considerable discussion. Mr. Leland re-emphasized the problem of preservation and destruction of records and observed that it must be considered also in view of the unpleasant prospect of serious national emergency. Both Mr. Connor and Mr. Buck of the National Archives stressed the primary obligation which the archivist owes to the officials and departments of the government which he serves; that his service to research scholars and to the general public must remain a secondary consideration. Other interesting comments were made by Mr. St. George L. Sioussat, Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Miss Margaret C. Norton, and Mr. Dorsey W. Hyde, and the discussion was ably directed by Mr. Kellar.

At the afternoon session on the Training of Archivists Mr. St. George L. Sioussat of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, presided and in his prefatory remarks paid further tribute to Dr. Thomas M. Owen, whose name he associated with J. Franklin Jameson, Gaillard Hunt, and other pioneers in archival and manuscript work. In the first paper on the program Mr. Theodore C. Pease of the University of Illinois observed that, whatever the formal training of the archivist, his human qualities will always be an essential factor in determining the measure of success he attains. Mr. Pease described the ideal archivist as one who liked people and was liked

by them, who had the common sense to temper the rules, and who was not fired with ambition to put the universe into a strait-jacket. The following paper was presented by Mr. Ernst W. Posner of the American University on "European Experiences in Training Archivists."⁴ On the continent the numerous training establishments developed either as graduate schools for instruction in history or as institutions especially designed for meeting the needs of state archival agencies. In both types appointments to archival positions can be made only from among those who have attended these schools and passed the final examination. However, since these institutions have felt that archival training must be part of a broader scientific education, most of these schools have kept in close contact with the universities of their countries. In the schools in Berlin-Dahlem, Brussels, and The Hague greater emphasis has been placed on modern materials, administrative history, and a broader conception of history, and less on medieval materials; and provision was made for including laboratory work in the curricula. From the conclusions based upon European experience Mr. Posner favored preappointment training with the advantage it offers in regard to future appointments, providing it has some kind of educational monopoly. He advocated broad training in advanced methods of research in history and related fields as a part of the archival curricula, offered in schools in or near an archives building so that laboratory work is available; teaching should be carried on in co-operation with a university in order to promote high scholarly standards.

The third speaker was Mr. Solon J. Buck of the National Archives who discussed "The Training of American Archivists." He began by distinguishing between the functions of a public archivist and those of a librarian. He described the body of knowledge designated as "archival science" as including American history, especially administrative history, political science, historical method, and other special fields to which the archival materials relate, and finally the more specialized knowledge designated as "archival economy," consisting of the history of archives and archives administration and theoretical and practical studies of the problems that confront archivists. General or background training can be obtained in most of our larger graduate schools, but more specialized work is not generally available. An account was given of the program for the training of archivists that has been developed in Washington by the American

⁴ Published in the present number of *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*.

University in co-operation with the National Archives. The paper concluded with a discussion of the prospects for the employment of professional archivists.

At the close of this session members of the Society enjoyed a tour of Montgomery by automobile, conducted by Mr. Peter A. Brannon of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The tour ended at the Executive Mansion where the members were guests at tea given by Governor and Mrs. Frank M. Dixon.

The final session of the Society's fourth annual meeting, held on Tuesday evening in the ballroom of the Jefferson Davis Hotel, was the occasion for the annual dinner and the presidential address. Mr. Albert B. Moore presided. In his address on "The Archivist in Times of Emergency,"⁵ President Leland stressed the responsibility of the archivist in preparing for the greatest of all emergencies—total war—and offered a concrete program of special activities for the Society. He dealt with two types of problems: (1) those with which the archivist is concerned as custodian of material things—distribution of the mass of records by transfer to places of safety, reduction of mass destruction of useless papers, and reduction of bulk by means of microphotography and by collaboration with administrators of governmental offices and departments in simplifying the practices of record making; (2) those problems that the archivist must deal with as a scholar and as interpreter of records—the study of the experience of the government in previous emergencies as revealed in the archives and the "exercise [of] leadership in a movement to gather and preserve the materials of all sorts upon which the history of the [present] emergency in all its aspects must ultimately be based." What was done along these lines in 1917-1918 can be vastly improved upon in the present crisis, President Leland pointed out, because we have the recorded experience of that effort to profit by and because the National Archives and numerous strong state archival establishments can co-operate with the further aid of the Society of American Archivists.

In concluding his timely and thought-provoking address President Leland made five specific proposals of long-term and briefer studies to meet these critical problems. Before adjournment Secretary Brooks announced that the Council of the Society had approved these proposals and that committees would be appointed in the immediate future to concentrate on these problems.

⁵ Published in the present number of THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST.

The meeting at Montgomery attracted many members of the Society in southern states who, because of the distance from previous places of meeting, had found it impossible to attend heretofore. The total registration was sixty-nine, which included seventeen from Washington, D.C., six from the eastern seaboard states, ten from the Middle West, and thirty-six from the South. The papers were all of high quality, affording many points for discussion and argument, and the presidential address was a distinct challenge to the members of the Society.

In the lobby of the Jefferson Davis Hotel was an exhibit of recent publications of archival institutions, historical societies, and other research libraries, and all publications of the Historical Records Survey. The large number of persons who took time to browse among these volumes fully justified the plan and effort to assemble them.

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