

Research Article

The Historian as Archival Advocate: Ulrich Bonnell Phillips and the Records of Georgia and the South

BY JOHN DAVID SMITH

Abstract: Historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips (1877-1934) is best known as the author of two of the most influential works in the field of Southern history, *American Negro Slavery* (1918) and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929). This article underscores Phillips's efforts to promote the location, appraisal, arrangement, description, and conservation of the historical documents, especially plantation manuscripts and local records, of the Old South. In 1903 Phillips prepared an important report for the American Historical Association surveying Georgia's archives. Two years later he summarized the state of archival affairs for the entire South. Phillips's advocacy of systematic archival practice in the South furthered his career, enhanced his private collection of manuscripts and documents, and encouraged the establishment of state and university archival programs in his native region.

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STUDENTS OF AMERICAN ARCHIVAL history recognize that in the early twentieth century the South led the way in the establishment of state-sponsored archival institutions.¹ Writing in 1905, Mississippi archivist Dunbar Rowland remarked that “the work of the archivist, in preserving the sources of truth, is fast becoming one of the most important activities in which historical agencies can engage.” “Progressive States,” Rowland explained, especially in the South, had already established “special departments for the care, classification, and publication of official archives” to provide historians with primary source materials.² Led by Thomas M. Owen, in 1901 Alabama founded its Department of Archives and History. Following Owen’s lead, Rowland campaigned for the establishment of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, which was established in 1902. A year later North Carolina chartered its Historical Commission directed by Robert D. W. Connor. Despite the South’s national leadership in documentary preservation, pioneer Southern historians nevertheless labored under serious problems as they sought evidence to document the history of their region.³

As early as 1892 a writer in the *Sewanee Review* implored historians to write “a true history” of the South before the materials for that history had vanished.⁴ A year later the literary editor of the Baltimore *Ameri-*

can, Lynn R. Meekins, urged historian Herbert Baxter Adams of The Johns Hopkins University to begin a study of Southern blacks. “I earnestly hope that you will,” Meekins explained, because “this is an important dividing line between generations and valuable material will soon be slipping away.”⁵ Too often manuscripts pertaining to the South were either lost, hoarded in attics, or rotted away in corncribs or other outbuildings. And many valuable historical manuscripts disappeared because few persons in the region recognized their value as historical evidence. Writing in 1903, John Franklin Jameson, editor of the *American Historical Review*, cautioned scholars to identify and preserve primary materials on Afro-American slavery. Jameson predicted that “a hundred years from now inquiring minds will be eagerly seeking knowledge of American slavery . . . [and] now is the golden time to collect the data, before it is too late.”⁶ In the same year an expert in the field remarked that only three repositories in the entire country—the Library of Congress, the Wisconsin State Historical Society, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History—held sufficient primary materials for the writing of Southern history.⁷ Indeed, locating the South’s historical manuscripts posed serious problems for the new generation of “scientific” historians at work writing the institutional history of their section.

As a result of these archival deficiencies, and decades before the appearance of repository guides and union manuscript cat-

¹See Robert Reynolds Simpson, “The Origin of State Departments of Archives and History in the South” (Ph.D. diss., University of Mississippi, 1971).

²Dunbar Rowland, “The Importance of Preserving Local Records, Illustrated by the Spanish Archives of the Natchez District,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1905* (2 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 1:205.

³See John David Smith, “The Formative Period of American Slave Historiography, 1890-1920” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1977), 5-11.

⁴Review of Thomas Nelson Page, *The Old South: Essays Social and Political*, in *Sewanee Review* 1 (November 1892): 90.

⁵Meekins to Adams, 10 April 1893, Herbert Baxter Adams Papers, The Johns Hopkins University Library.

⁶Charles H. Haskins, “Report of the Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903* (2 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 1:29.

⁷Ulrich B. Phillips to Yates Snowden, 13 January 1903, Yates Snowden Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.



Ulrich B. Phillips (Courtesy of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana)

alogs, historians were forced to scour the South in what amounted to self-archival work, including acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, description, and, in some cases,

conservation. In 1905, for example, Jame-son began a systematic search for historical manuscripts throughout the South. Professor Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard Uni-

versity advised him to seek the assistance of those with the necessary personal connections in the region—the descendants of the South’s plantation gentry.⁸ Mississippi planter and historian Alfred Holt Stone cast his net widely in tracking down historical materials on the plantation system. In 1907 Stone told historian William E. Dodd that “I am in search of all forms of sugar, rice, tobacco, indigo and cotton plantation records,—such as journals, diaries, account books, account sales, cotton picking records, instructions to overseers. . . . I want anything which will throw the least light upon the economic side of the institution of slavery.”⁹

Among historians of these years, Georgia native Ulrich Bonnell Phillips (1877-1934) proved most successful in locating, utilizing, and promoting the importance of antebellum Southern historical records. Phillips identified—and urged the preservation of—manuscripts, especially those pertaining to slavery and the plantation system. Phillips employed these sources in writing or editing eight books, most notably *American Negro Slavery* (1918) and *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929). These works, though by today’s standards methodologically backward, racist, paternalistic, and proslavery, thrust Phillips into the first rank of American historians of his generation. He dominated the historiography of slavery in the first half of the twentieth century. His use of plantation manuscripts, then relatively obscure and arcane sources, enabled Phillips to delineate slavery’s institutional features, to analyze its profitability on a cost basis, and to probe the dynamics of the master-slave relationship.¹⁰ Though Phillips’s Jim Crow-era

interpretations lost favor with historians in the 1950s, his contributions as a pioneer historian and advocate of systematic archival practice deserve careful analysis.

Significantly, Phillips uncovered vast riches of Southern manuscripts—plantation records as well as those pertaining to other aspects of Southern history. Well ahead of his time, he underscored the precarious, neglected condition of the South’s widely-dispersed private papers and official documents. Phillips emphasized the importance of arranging and preserving these records. In 1903, for instance, he complained that Northerners had dominated the writing of American history. “It must be written anew before it reaches its final form of truth, and for that work the South must do its part in preparation.” Regrettably, Phillips added, Southern history lagged behind other research topics principally because “most of the [region’s documentary] material is inaccessible.” Three years later Phillips admonished Yates Snowden of the University of South Carolina to take pains to conserve the plantation records in his care. “For God’s sake,” commanded Phillips, “keep ’em in a fire-proof vault.”¹¹ Indeed, Phillips took advantage of every opportunity to encourage the establishment of repositories of historical manuscripts in his native region.

Trained in the “scientific” historical methodology of his day at the University of Georgia and Columbia University, Phillips was determined to attain “objectivity” by allowing the primary sources to speak for themselves. Phillips believed strongly in plantation records because he looked upon them as unconscious sources for the eco-

⁸Jameson to Thomas M. Owen, 14 January 1905, Jameson to Hart, 12 January 1905, Hart to Jameson, 23 January 1905, J. Franklin Jameson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹Stone to Dodd, 10 July 1907, William E. Dodd Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New*

South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 239-284.

¹¹Phillips to George J. Baldwin, 2 May 1903, Ulrich B. Phillips Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Phillips to Snowden, 31 March 1906, Snowden Papers.

conomic and social history of the South. He regretted that because "original material" on the history of the South had been so scarce, previous writers substituted guess work "for understanding in many cases when attempting to interpret Southern developments." "The most reliable source of knowledge" for the history of slavery, Phillips explained, "and the source least used thus far," were plantation records—"documents written with no thought of reaching the public eye, writings whose purpose is to give the plain facts and nothing else." He predicted that once plantation records were made available to researchers, "travelers' accounts, fallacious as they usually are, will be duly relegated to a place of very minor importance."¹²

Phillips was the only Southern historian early in the twentieth century systematically to exploit planters' letters, diaries, and ledgers on a large scale. In 1903, in one of his first publications, he implored researchers to integrate a broad range of primary sources into their writings on the South. "For a complete view of the life of the community," Phillips explained, "the town records must be supplemented with the county archives, the state documents, the newspaper files, travelers' accounts, and private correspondence."¹³ He also employed census data in conjunction with these records. Phillips similarly paved the way

in the extensive use of Southern newspapers and of correspondence between masters and overseers. He gleaned much statistical information for charts and graphs from city directories, bills of sale, slave price quotations, slave ship manifests, and cotton factors' account statements. Phillips not only utilized numerous plantation manuscripts in his writings, but published as edited documents some of the more valuable papers that he unearthed, including *Plantation and Frontier Documents: 1649-1863* (2 vols., 1909) and "The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb" (1913). He also innovatively mined such hitherto unknown sources as 1,300 vouchers of slaves convicted of capital crimes. Phillips uncovered these records at the Virginia State Library.

As much as any archivist, Phillips understood the value to the historian of rare books and documents. While in graduate school at Georgia he served as assistant university librarian. In 1901, the university's chancellor, citing Phillips's willingness to undertake "special training" in library science, heartily recommended his appointment as Librarian, a proposal that never came to pass. After joining the history faculty at the University of Wisconsin in 1902, Phillips proposed an arrangement whereby he would devote one-third of each year teaching at Madison, and the remainder as librarian at the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah.¹⁴ With much the same commitment to the preservation of manuscripts as archivists Owen, Rowland, and Connor, Phillips linked the future of Southern history as a research field to the availability of the region's primary sources. Accordingly, in 1903 Phillips accepted a proposal from

¹²Phillips, unpublished and untitled manuscript beginning, "The field of Southern history is so rich" [1904?], Ulrich B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library; Phillips, "Documentary Collections and Publication in the Older States of the South," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1905* (2 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 1:203-204. For a critique of Phillips as "scientific" historian, see W. K. Wood, "U. B. Phillips, Unscientific Historian: A Further Note on His Methodology and Use of Sources," *Southern Studies* 21 (Summer 1982): 146-162.

¹³Phillips, "Historical Notes of Milledgeville, Ga.," *The Gulf States Historical Magazine* 2 (November 1903): 170.

¹⁴*Report of the Chancellor of the University of Georgia* (1901), 11-12, Phillips Collection; Wendell H. Stephenson, "Ulrich B. Phillips, the University of Georgia, and the Georgia Historical Society," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 41 (June 1957): 118-125.

Herman V. Ames, chair of the American Historical Association's (AHA) Public Archives Commission, to prepare an extensive inventory of Georgia's official records. Phillips was especially well-suited to the task, having examined many of Georgia's records while researching his award-winning doctoral dissertation, *Georgia and State Rights* (1902). Even before starting his project for the AHA, Phillips remarked that problems awaited anyone who sought to identify and urge the preservation of Georgia's archival records. "There are stacks of valuable documents now being eaten by rats in the state capitol," he complained, "and lots of others in private hands in every part of the state."¹⁵

Phillips linked the deplorable condition of Georgia's documents to what he considered to be the overall backwardness of the state's historical activities. Influenced strongly by the ethos of professionalism and efficiency espoused by Progressives in Wisconsin and elsewhere, he advised Georgians to establish a modern historical society, one staffed by "scientific" historians. "In general," argued Phillips, "the most important policy is . . . to keep the old fossils out of office, and prevent the society from becoming antiquarian rather than historical. . . . Of course, the genealogists and the collectors of arrow-heads, who think they are historical students must be coddled sometimes." But, he insisted, "for practical work men of true historical interest and training must be had." Phillips argued that only a trained professional should tackle the overwhelming task of organizing the Georgia state papers in their confused condition. "Even a synopsis of them," he wrote, "cannot be made without heavy work. It should not be attempted by anyone who does not know the relative value of

historical documents, or who has not had a technical training in historical work." Phillips proposed that the first step in the process would be the kind of preliminary report of the state's records that he was preparing for the AHA.¹⁶

Phillips began his canvass of Georgia's archives by conferring with Governor Joseph M. Terrell and former Governor Allen D. Candler, the latter serving as Georgia state historian and compiler of records. After his thorough examination of the documents, Phillips concluded that Georgia's state and local records constituted "one of the most valuable collections of unexploited official documents now to be found in America." But as elsewhere in the South, Phillips lamented, Georgia's state and local records suffered from problems of arrangement, description, and conservation. These problems were exacerbated, he said, by the fact that Candler, though well-intentioned, was "sure to do no work of value in his present office." According to Phillips, Candler not only lacked historical training, but spent most of his time merely "drawing his salary." In Phillips's judgment, Georgia's archives would suffer as long as they were entrusted to an untrained "political employee." The state drastically required "expert and enthusiastic service" in its archival and documentary publication programs.¹⁷

Phillips deplored the fact that many of Georgia's early records had gone astray. He judged possibly "the most serious loss"

¹⁶Phillips to George J. Baldwin, 17 April 1903, Phillips Papers.

¹⁷Phillips, "The Public Archives of Georgia," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903* (2 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 1:439; Phillips to George J. Baldwin, 17 April, 26 September, 1903, Phillips Papers. In spite of Phillips's negative assessment, between 1904-1916 Candler edited thirty-five volumes of Georgia Colonial, Revolutionary, and Confederate Records. See Theodore H. Jack, "The Preservation of Georgia History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 4 (July 1927): 245-246.

¹⁵Phillips to Frederick Jackson Turner, 12 July 1903, Frederick Jackson Turner Correspondence, University of Wisconsin Archives; Phillips to Lucien H. Boggs, 23 February 1903, Phillips Papers.

to have been the letters to the governors prior to around 1840, which were never transcribed. Other records, that had no direct connection to Georgia history, had erroneously been placed with the state's documents. Many early documents that belonged in county and municipal offices lay instead in the state archives in Atlanta. To illustrate another problem, Phillips described a volume of bills of sale and deeds of gift, located among the executive department's archives, that should logically have been deposited in the state department. Other historical records had simply vanished, grumbled Phillips. He was disappointed, for instance, to discover that manuscript state census returns "for but few of the counties are to be found in any degree of completeness," and those for 1824 and 1831 were "fragmentary." Virtually no records existed before 1858 for the city of Athens. Though its modern records were well-housed in fireproof vaults, Phillips surmised that the university town's early documents were destroyed by Union troops, "or that the documents were hidden by the townspeople during Sherman's invasion and have never been restored to the archives room." In any case, he regretted that the surviving documents reflected "many signs of neglect" and supposed "that at some period the custodian destroyed part of the archives as rubbish."¹⁸

Phillips criticized the arrangement of Georgia's records—even those in the capitol building—describing them as "to a large degree haphazard." Except for the land records in the department of state, Phillips discovered little systematic arrangement anywhere. Even these important records were "preserved in a thousand or more pigeon-hole boxes." Phillips found the rec-

ords of the colonial period "numbered in some obscure system with letters of the alphabet." He described a collection of "miscellaneous original documents"—reports and letters—tied in packages with labels and stacked upon four shelves in the main archives room of the state department. These documented Georgia's relations with the French and Spanish at Natchez and St. Augustine "concerning desperadoes on the Florida boundary." Records pertaining to postbellum expenditures, explained Phillips, were located "around the walls of the main document room of the executive department" in "tall cases of dust-proof pigeonholes."¹⁹

More troublesome, in Phillips's opinion, was the arrangement and description of Georgia's antebellum records and those for the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. Phillips described these as "among the most important in the capitol." Located in the "overflow document room"—an obscure, isolated room on the third floor of the capitol—these documents were stored in packages, some labeled, some not. "From careless handling many of the documents have become displaced from the packages in which they belong," Phillips explained. He wrote with disgust that these packages were stacked carelessly "along the walls in open shelves or bins, with just the faintest hint of classification. For practical research, the documents might almost as well be in a promiscuous heap upon the floor. The room has no attendant, and apparently is not visited as often as once a year. There are 160 of these bins full of papers, each bin about 3 feet long and a foot high." These manuscripts included the "Rough Minutes" of the Governor's Council for the colonial period, "discovered" in the basement of the capitol only a few years prior to Phillips's survey. According to Phillips,

¹⁸Phillips, "The Public Archives of Georgia," 440, 459-460, 455; Phillips, "Georgia Local Archives," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1904* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), 592.

¹⁹Phillips, "The Public Archives of Georgia," 441, 444, 449, 454.

they contained valuable information regarding appointments and passports granted for travel into the Creek nation.²⁰

Phillips regretted that other noteworthy documents had suffered from the vicissitudes of Georgia's history and from poor handling. In Milledgeville, which preceded Atlanta as Georgia's capital, the frequent removal of records, and what Phillips termed "the destructive work of Sherman's troops" in 1864, wreaked "sad havoc . . . among the loose documents" and damaged bound material as well. A volume of eighteenth-century wills, for example, had been "mutilated by the cutting out of pages, possibly blank, at the back." He fumed that the gaps in the early nineteenth-century county records housed in the Milledgeville court house resulted not only from a court house fire in 1861, but from "the inattention of the officers in charge and the lack of any secure vault or case for the volumes and papers." Records found in the Milledgeville town clerk's office, Phillips said, lacked any semblance of arrangement or care. "Some of them have been damaged by mice, and all of them . . . are exceedingly dusty and disagreeable to use."²¹

Phillips was glad to report that the offices of the county clerk and ordinary in Lexington, Oglethorpe County, were equipped with a fireproof vault for their local archives. Though some of the county's records were disorganized, he wrote happily that the original records in the ordinary's office were "well classified, tied in packets, clearly labeled, and stacked upon open shelves in very good arrangement." Similarly, the archives of Habersham County in Clarkesville were protected in a fireproof vault. Phillips found the bound volumes "in fairly good order, but the original documents not in books are in extreme disorder, with very many of them probably lost."

He noted that the court records for Habersham County included valuable deeds, bills of sale, wills, and inventories, as well as a group of private records—merchants' account books, cash books, day books, journals, and ledgers. Unfortunately, the historian said, the court documents were "scattered in utter disarrangement in open pigeonholes and packing cases." Although the clerk's office had "a good set of dust-proof filing cases in the vault," Phillips complained that "very few documents have been arranged therein." The bound volumes were unlabeled and, Phillips griped, were largely maintained in a "slovenly fashion."²²

Similarly, the archives of Clarke County, located in Athens, were protected in a fireproof vault. Phillips found the original writs, fifas, and orders "in good preservation, and mostly well arranged in metal dust-proof filing cases." Though many of the bound volumes in the clerk's office had their bindings scorched in a court house fire, fortunately, Phillips declared, "no important documents appear to have been destroyed." He complimented the arrangement of these records which "show evidences of much care in their keeping." Included in the clerk's office were bound volumes of rare nineteenth-century Georgia newspapers and "an old trunk" containing miscellaneous private manuscripts. In the ordinary's office Phillips encountered many documents filed in no special arrangement in a set of wooden pigeonholes. The vault contained "several trunks and cases of private papers" as well as a packing case full of loose newspapers, pamphlets, and manuscripts. Among these documents was an 1823 committee report on Clarke County's regimental fund, enumerating persons liable to drill, with fines collected and uncollected.²³

²⁰Ibid., 454, 451.

²¹Ibid., 440, 444, 461, 467.

²²Phillips, "Georgia Local Archives," 555, 568, 569, 581.

²³Ibid., 582, 583, 584.

Phillips gained many insights into the nature of slavery on the local level from his survey of Georgia's records. Using Taliaferro County as an example, he compared data drawn from the 1827 state census and the 1860 federal census. This county, typical of the upland Georgia cotton belt, showed a decrease in white population (2,038 to 1,693) in these years but increases in its free black (32 to 41) and slave (2,394 to 2,849) populations. In terms of slaveholdings, Phillips identified 178 slaveholders who owned fewer than ten slaves each in 1860 as compared with 198 in the same category in 1831. In contrast, 93 slaveholders held ten or more slaves in 1860 as compared with 81 in that category in 1831. From this rough data, Phillips concluded that the small holdings of slaves in this portion of Georgia "were gradually decreasing in number and also in size, while the large holdings were gradually increasing in number and in size as well." Phillips interpreted "this tendency as a general law of the plantation system—that, within the limit at which plantations grew too large to be manageable, the tendency in the staple-producing region was for the size of plantations under good management to increase until the maximum efficiency was reached, while the size of those under weak management tended to decrease until they lost their complex organization and became simple farms."²⁴

By comparing the 1824 manuscript census for Crawford County with the 1860 federal enumeration, Phillips gleaned valuable demographic information regarding slavery's place in the settling of west Georgia's cotton belt. In 1824 the county was dominated by small farmers, 65% of all white families in the county held no slaves, and 50% of those remaining held fewer than

four slaves each. Only eleven families of the 330 in the county held as many as eleven bondsmen each. By 1860, however, planters increased their holdings both of land and slaves. Plantations gradually encroached upon the land hitherto controlled by small farmers. As a result many small farmers moved in search of fresh lands, "where they might live more cheaply as self-sufficient producers, having little to do with staples, money, or markets." By 1860 the number of slaveholding families had increased to 369, holding a total of 4,270 bondsmen. Phillips concluded that "The pioneer work throughout the South seems to have been done by the yeoman class and the younger sons of the well to do, while the wave of planters followed later and was confined to the staple-producing areas and to the districts lying in reach of markets."²⁵

From his examination of Baldwin County records of sale and estate inventories, Phillips concluded that the records of appraisements and sales of estates "comprise the chief source from which may be had of the rise and fall of slave prices." Because the available published data on slave prices and the economics of slavery was so "scanty and fugitive, and often unreliable," Phillips predicted that a comparative study, juxtaposing data from throughout the slaveholding regions of the North and South, "will be essential as a basis for any definitive economic history of slavery in America."²⁶

His study of tax digests for Oglethorpe County enabled Phillips to draw conclusions concerning not only slaveholding, but also postwar labor and race relations in the Georgia Piedmont. From an average slaveholding of 5 in 1794 (395 slaveholders owned 1,980 slaves), to an average slave-

²⁴Phillips, "The Public Archives of Georgia," 456, 457.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 458.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 464.

holding of 12 in 1860 (549 slaveholders owned 6,589 slaves), this county exhibited “a fairly continuous increase in the proportion of Negroes to whites in the population.” Phillips pointed to an 1899 indenture agreement—one among many on file in Oglethorpe County—between a planter, James M. Smith, and a black, Anderson Benson, to illustrate “the degree to which the plantation system has been maintained in spite of the overthrow of the institution of slavery.” In the agreement Benson bound himself to labor for Smith for a term of five years. Resembling the labor contracts that blacks signed during Reconstruction, Benson agreed “to work faithfully” under Smith’s “direction, respect and obey all orders and commands” and “at all times demean himself orderly and soberly.” In addition to furnishing his apprentice with board, lodging, clothing, and fifty dollars a year as compensation, Smith agreed to teach Benson “the trade of husbandry in all its details.”²⁷

Phillips’s insights into the condition of Georgia’s archival materials enabled him in 1905 to broaden his analysis to include the records of the entire South. He concluded that archival conditions in the region still left room for vast improvement. While Phillips regretted that many of the South’s most valuable documents had found “refuge” in Washington and in the North, he was forced to admit that in these repositories Southern manuscripts “received more care and attention than if they had remained in their original localities.” Though his earlier study of Georgia’s records had underscored its rich holdings of public records, Phillips now complained that the state had not yet begun to systematize the manuscripts held in the capitol building. And researchers would find few valuable man-

uscripts at the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah. Indeed, Phillips said, “the most important documentary collections” were held privately. While Phillips generally considered Virginia’s archives more accessible, he urged that state to provide some sort of finding aid—“a calendar or even a finding list for the whole body of archives.” He criticized Virginia’s documentary publication program, the Virginia State Papers series, as “an unsystematized mass of heterogeneous and often worthless items.” And Phillips found fault with Tennessee’s archives. Aside from some newspaper collections at the Tennessee State Library and the Tennessee Historical Society, he identified “no other public collection of material in the State worth the mention, nor any noteworthy publication of documents.”²⁸

Phillips noted similar problems in South Carolina. The state had undertaken no major documentary publication program and the strength of its archival holdings lay mostly in newspaper collections. In Charleston, Phillips located newspaper files “of quite phenomenal extent,” dating from the earliest newspaper published in the colony in 1732. South Carolina’s state records, however, located in Charleston and Columbia, stood “in great confusion.” The old volumes of colonial records at Charleston, deplored Phillips, “have had their brittle and broken pages mended in an atrocious way by the pasting of a heavy white cloth over one side of each sheet. The cloth is absolutely opaque. Every alternate page is thus blotted out of the record, and such volumes thereby [are] rendered almost useless.” And despite his repeated efforts to examine the manuscripts at the South Carolina Historical Society in Charleston,

²⁷Phillips, “Georgia Local Archives,” 560, 566, 567.

²⁸Phillips, “Documentary Collections and Publication in the Older States of the South,” 203, 201, 202, 202-203.

Phillips found access to these records most difficult. As in Georgia and throughout the South, most of the valuable collections of South Carolina family and plantation records lay in private possession.²⁹

Phillips concluded that while the South had indeed made progress in organizing and preserving its historical materials, archival management in the region remained largely in its infancy. Although the South held vast quantities of manuscripts, few historians could gain access to them and they remained unused. Most of these documents rested in private hands and stood "unclassified, undigested, unknown." Phillips complained that even the pioneer efforts of Southern archivists had been "partly wasted," because their "need of training, enthusiasm, and personal force" had partially been ignored. As a result "the documents and their use have suffered accordingly." He judged the region to be disadvantaged because no Southern university had yet begun to collect historical manuscripts. Phillips hoped that Southerners would come to grasp the broad benefits of studying history, not for "utilitarian purpose," but "for history's sake." He feared, however, that "from their lack of social self-consciousness" Southerners "are not likely to develop a genuine passion for preserving and publishing their records."³⁰

Phillips's doubts ultimately proved to be well-founded. Notwithstanding his path-breaking efforts to identify, preserve, publicize, and utilize the South's historical manuscripts, Southern historians continued to encounter major difficulties in locating sources until the 1930s. The establishment of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina in 1930, and Duke University's Manuscript Department in 1931, ushered in an era of systematic archival collection and management in the

South. Significantly, in 1928 Phillips had recommended that funds be allocated to help establish the collection at Chapel Hill. As "a reward of virtue," but certainly influenced by Phillips's endorsement of the funding of the collection, Phillips was given first opportunity to examine a "most wonderful body of plantation material" by his old friend J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, founder of the Southern Historical Collection.³¹ But this and other infant collections of Southern Americana would take decades to mature into major repositories.

In the years before his death in 1934, Phillips continued to comb the South's countryside in search of the plantation documents that he cited in his books and articles. He received valuable assistance in collecting manuscripts from Herbert A. Kellar, curator of the McCormick Historical Association. By the late 1920s, according to historian Merton L. Dillon, Phillips "had become a dealer in manuscripts and Americana as well as a scholar and collector."³² Since the turn of the century Phillips had actively promoted archival practices and the use of primary sources for the study of Southern history. Many of the manuscripts that he unearthed in the early 1900s

³¹J. Carlyle Sitterson, "The Southern Historical Collection, 1930-1980: The Pursuit of History," *The Bookmark* (Chapel Hill: The Friends of the Library and the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1981), 46-59; Mattie U. Russell, "Brief History of the Manuscript Department and the Flowers Collection," *Duke University Library Newsletter*, n.s., 24 (April 1980): 4-5; Hamilton to Phillips, 27 October 1928, Dexter Perkins to Hamilton, 7 January 1929, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³²John David Smith, "'Keep 'em in a fire-proof vault'—Pioneer Southern Historians Discover Plantation Records," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 78 (Summer 1979): 387-391; Dillon, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Historian of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 125, 126. Dillon argues that "Phillips' large reputation as a discoverer and user of" private manuscripts "rests in great measure upon the materials Kellar helped him acquire from 1925 to 1929."

²⁹*Ibid.*, 201, 202.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 203, 204.

were employed again and again in his later writings. These records provided a foundation for his lifelong research into the history of slavery and the South. They reinforced his conservative social ethos and paternalistic view of blacks.

In part, Phillips's motives as a historian who favored the establishment of archives were self-serving. An aggressive, competitive scholar, he sought not only to establish Southern history as a research field, but to dominate it. In order to do so, Phillips required primary sources. But as a Southern Progressive and spokesman of the New South, Phillips linked his region's future to an understanding of its past.³³ He believed that his lobbying for modern archival practices in the South would reap both personal benefits as well as those for the intellectual life of his region. Significantly, Phillips helped lead the South away from antiquarianism to modern historical methodology. As propagandist for the systematic care of Georgia's public records, Phillips helped pave the way for Georgia archivists Allen D. Candler, William J. Northen, and Lucian Lamar Knight. In 1918 Georgia's Department of Archives and History was established.³⁴

³³John Herbert Roper, *U. B. Phillips: A Southern Mind* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 67-89.

³⁴Commenting on Phillips's assessment of Georgia's public records, as well as Maud Barker Cobb's

Though himself a collector, Phillips encouraged Southern archives and libraries to acquire manuscripts for the use of the broad scholarly community. He implored Southern state legislatures to build manuscript collections, to conserve them, and to staff them with trained professionals. Although Phillips once aspired to a joint professor-librarian position, he never performed archival functions to more than a limited degree. His substantial contribution to archival development was an insistence on adequate resources for the systematic care of historical records by trained professionals. Phillips was an effective advocate because of his professional standing, his deep commitment to the use of primary materials, and his keen familiarity with archival conditions in the South. Though a historian, Phillips provided leadership at a time when the archival profession was just beginning to emerge. As historian and archival advocate, then, Phillips provided an important impetus to the development of archives in the South. He serves as a valuable example of the role that a scholar—a historian sensitive to the importance of archival materials—can make to the preservation of records.

1917 survey, Mary Givens Bryan remarked: "Some items they reported missing have turned up in the assembling of the archives, while others reported on file are today missing." See Bryan, "Recent Archival Developments in Georgia," *American Archivist* 16 (January 1953): 56.