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The Mississippi Department of Archives and History  
by  
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Since the Mississippi Territory was established in 1798, the state archives have been moved more than a dozen times. The territorial archives were first housed at Concord, the former residence of the Spanish provincial governor, in Natchez and then moved in 1801 along with the territorial capital to Washington, six miles northeast of Natchez.

Mississippi was admitted to the Union as the twentieth state on December 10, 1817, and two years later the archives of the state were deposited with the librarian at Jefferson College in Washington. Following the cession by the Choctaw Indians of more than five million acres of land in central Mississippi under the provisions of the Treaty of Doak's Stand in 1820, the General Assembly determined that the capital should be moved to a site near the geographic center of the state. In 1821, the state archives were moved to Columbia, which was chosen to serve as the temporary state capital. Later that year, the General Assembly voted to relocate the capital to an unsettled site known as "LeFleur's Bluff" on the banks of the Pearl River in the newly created Hinds County. The capital city was literally carved out of the wilderness and named "Jackson" in honor of Andrew Jackson, the hero of the War of 1812 who was immensely popular with most Mississippians. The archives were subsequently moved to Jackson and deposited in the small two-story state house building that was constructed in 1822 on the northeast corner of Capitol and President streets.

A decade later, the legislature set in place the state's first capital improvement program. An act was passed in 1833 to authorize the construction of a new state house and a "suitable house" for the governor. An impressive Greek Revival capitol building was completed in 1840 at the head of Capitol Street, and the archives were moved once again. During the Civil War, federal troops occupied Jackson on four separate occasions, and the archives had to be moved hurriedly to Meridian, Enterprise, Columbus, and Macon before being returned in 1865 to Jackson, where they were stored in the state library on the third floor of the Capitol.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the capitol had fallen into disrepair, and the weight of the archives above the chambers of the Supreme Court was considered a hazard to the judges below, so an order was issued in 1896 to send the archives to the state penitentiary that was located several blocks away. Four years later, the penitentiary was demolished to provide the site for the construction of the New Capitol, and the archives were returned to the Old Capitol, where they were strewn and scattered throughout the halls and corridors of the building.

The Department of Archives and History was founded in 1902, and the Department's first director, Dunbar Rowland, assumed responsibility for the care and custody of the state archives, which he found in less than desirable archival conditions in the capitol. The Department, along with the state archives, was relocated to the ground floor of the New Capitol in 1903. Dr. Rowland, a pioneer in archival administration, set in place the Department's initial archival classification system that was used for many years.

In 1941 the Department of Archives and History was relocated to the north wing of the recently completed War Memorial Building. This move was accomplished during the administration of Dr. William D. McCain, who became the Department's second director in 1938 following the death of Dr. Rowland.

I joined the staff of the Department of Archives and History on July 1, 1965, and was trained by the Department's third director, Charlotte Capers, whose distinguished career with the Department spanned some forty-five years (1938-1983). When I came to the Department, I was assigned desk space in the basement of the War Memorial Building in an area that was affectionately referred to by staff members as the "dungeon." I had no prior archival experience, but I soon realized that the Department had run out of archival storage space. The aisles and shelves were completely covered with boxes of processed and unprocessed records. Miss Capers worked with the Department's Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Historical Society to petition the Mississippi Legislature for funds to construct a new Archives and History building in observance of the sesquicentennial of Mississippi statehood. Bond funds for the construction of the new archives and history building were allocated by the Legislature in 1967 during the administration of Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr.

Although Miss Capers and the Board of Trustees had identified the need for at least a five-story building, the funds that were allocated for the project were sufficient only for the construction of a three-story structure. Miss Capers and Dr. R. A. McLemore, who became the Department's fourth director in 1969, oversaw the planning and construction of the new building. The building, which would later be named in honor of Miss Capers, was dedicated on June 3, 1971, and for the first time the state archives were moved to a building that was designed specifically as an archival repository. At the time, the Charlotte Capers Building was spacious and provided the best environmental protection that had ever been extended to the state's irreplaceable records.

The 1970s witnessed a tremendous increase in the public's interest in history, genealogy, and historic preservation, and it was not long before we recognized that we were beginning to run out of space in the new building. I was appointed by the Board of Trustees to serve as the Department's fifth director in July of 1973 and have been blessed in having the opportunity to work with a non-political board and truly outstanding staff since that time. As the state's first historical records coordinator, I worked with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, which awarded grants to the states to conduct statewide historical assessment studies. Mississippi was one of the first states in the nation to receive such a grant, and the grant project was administered by the Department of Archives and History. H. T. Holmes, the current Archives and Library Division director, directed the Department's statewide assessment that addressed the state's historical records problems and needs. Under Hank's splendid guidance, a report was produced in 1982 that included as one of its recommendations the construction of a new archives and history building to coincide with the observance of the Department's centennial in 2002. Had it not been for some unexpected construction delays, Hank would have been right on the mark in his vision for the new building that was dedicated this past year.

By the late 1980s, we recognized that the Department's space crisis was acute, and with the support of the Board of Trustees, we began to explore possible solutions for our archival space problems. The Board authorized us to engage Robert Parker Adams, a preservation-oriented architect here in Jackson, to study the Capers Building to determine if it could be enlarged. As we moved along with this study, we concluded that the Board's initial vision back in the late 1960s for a five-story structure could not be realized without creating an archives building whose mass and scale would dominate the historic Old Capitol. At that point, it became obvious that the Capers Building could be expanded only to the south; however, our study found that there was not enough land space in that area to accommodate the needed expansion. We were also confronted with the reality that the 1980s were not a prosperous time for the State of Mississippi---the "flush times" of the 1990s were not yet upon us.

To obtain partial relief for our archival storage problems, we decided to pursue funding for the installation of compact moveable shelving that would enable us to gain the use of the aisle spaces in the archival storage areas. Under the guidance of Robert Parker Adams, we soon realized that there was a

lot that we had to learn about compact shelving and that there were many different shelving manufacturers, each of whom, of course, felt that their particular shelving product was the world's best. Mr. Adams reminded us that we also needed to be sure that the structural design of the Capers Building would support the added weight of the compact shelving and the additional records that would be stored in the building. Clyde Maxwell, who had served as the structural engineer for the Capers Building, graciously agreed to re-evaluate his structural computations. Following a number of core borings in the floors in the archival storage areas, Mr. Maxwell concluded that we would be safe in proceeding with the installation of compact shelving provided that we loaded the shelves in a particular manner that involved weighing every box of records. Securing Mr. Maxwell's approval meant that we were now faced with perhaps a more difficult challenge, i.e. obtaining funding from the Legislature for the purchase and installation of the compact shelving. By this time, we had learned that we were going to need approximately \$500,000 to complete the shelving project.

After failing to secure an endorsement of the shelving project from the Bureau of Building, Grounds and Real Property Management, I decided that I would make a special appeal to my state senator, Bob Montgomery of Canton, who served as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the committee in the Senate through which all bond funding must pass. In my mind's eye, I can still visualize the meeting of the Senate Finance Committee in 1990 when the committee took under consideration the bill that would include the committee's recommended bond projects for Fiscal Year 1991. I waited in suspense as Senator Montgomery went down the list of projects that were to be included in the bond bill and breathed a sigh of relief when the last project that he named was "Moveable shelving for the Charlotte Capers Archives and History Building---\$500,000."

The bond bill that year, as is the case with most bond bills, ended up in conference. I remember getting a call at home on a Saturday morning near the end of the session from the late Senator Kenneth Williams of Clarksdale. Senator Williams was one of my longtime friends in the Legislature and had always made it a point to look out for the interests of the Department of Archives and History. The conversation went something like this---"Elbert, this is Kenneth Williams. I just wanted to let you know that you are going to get your money for the moveable shelving at the Archives, and I think that you should make a special effort to thank Senator Mohamed the next time you come over to the Capitol." Senator Williams went on to say that "every time the conferees would meet, Ollie would go in the meeting and before anything could be discussed, he would ask if they had the moveable shelving at the Archives on their list of projects. The other conferees finally got so amused by Ollie's persistence that one of them asked, 'Ollie, why is it that you are so interested in the moveable shelving at the Archives?' In response to the question, Ollie said, 'My momma wants it.'"

Senator Mohamed's mother, of course, was Mrs. Ethel Mohamed of Belzoni, a remarkable needlework artist. Mrs. Mohamed had been closely associated with the Department of Archives and History since the time of her participation in the Festival of American Folk Life in Washington, D. C., in 1974. Mississippi's participation in the Festival that year had been coordinated by the Department of Archives and History, and Mrs. Mohamed went to Washington with us. That event marked the beginning of our longstanding friendship with a wonderful lady and her family, which just happened to include one of the most influential members of the Mississippi Legislature. My recounting Senator Williams's telephone call reinforces a truth that I learned long ago: to be effective, a state agency head needs to have friends in the Legislature.

Recognizing that the installation of the compact moveable shelving was only a temporary space-saving measure, we began to talk several years later with Jerry Oakes, director of the Bureau of Building, Grounds and Real Property Management. Having heard mention of the need for a master plan for the expansion of the Capitol Complex, I made it a point to talk with Jerry about the space crisis that

confronted the Department of Archives and History and my vision for a new State History Center that would be located on the seat-of-government property immediately north of the Old Capitol Complex. In light of his position, Jerry, of course, was giving first priority in his thinking to the numerous state agencies that were occupying rented space, to the never-ending requests for renovation and repair funds from the universities, community colleges, and state agencies, and to the wishes of the Supreme Court justices for a new court building. Although he did not fully subscribe to my vision for a State History Center, I shall always be indebted to Jerry for his decision to include a new Archives and History building in the preplanning that the 1995 Legislature had authorized for the expansion of the Capitol Complex. Rather than the aforementioned seat-of-government land being used for the construction of a new Archives and History building and a new Museum of Mississippi History, Jerry saw the area north of the Old Capitol complex as the site for three new buildings---the court building, the new Archives and History building, and another unidentified building that might possibly house the Mississippi Library Commission.

Unfortunately, Jerry was diagnosed with cancer, and his illness kept him from being present when the Capitol Complex bond bill was being considered by the 1997 Legislature. When the bill was considered by the Senate, it was loaded up with projects that would necessitate the issuance of well over \$200 million in bonds. When it became obvious that the bill had no chance for passage, I sought out Dr. Ed Ranck, director, Department of Finance and Administration, the person to whom Jerry reported. I asked Dr. Ranck if he had any words of wisdom for us in regard to how we might salvage a preplanning project for a new Archives and History Building. Dr. Ranck's response was that "every man is on his own." As I reflect back on that day, I cannot help but feel that Dr. Ranck was thinking that there would be no talk of a new Archives and History building for at least another year.

John Gilbert, the current secretary of the Mississippi State Senate, was serving at that time as director of accounting and finance for the Department of Archives and History and was with me when I spoke to Dr. Ranck. John could read the disappointment on my face when we heard Dr. Ranck's statement and encouraged me not to give up hope. He suggested that we go back to the Charlotte Capers Building to pull up the legislative database on the computer to see what bond bills were still alive. Through his years of experience in observing the Legislature in action, John knew that, in many instances, the most opportune time to seek legislative action is during the latter part of legislative sessions when the conference committees are meeting. Conference reports are filed by three senators and three representatives, and, in most cases, the reports are adopted by both houses of the Legislature.

When John researched the bond bills that were still being considered in the Legislature, we found that only one of the bills had any possible connection with the Department of Archives and History --- a bill that provided funding for new transmission towers for the Mississippi Authority for Educational Television (ETV). John and I agreed that we should make an effort to have the funding for the Department of Archives and History capital improvement preplanning included in the bond bill for ETV because our work is also educational in nature.

I called former Governor William Winter, the longtime president of the Board of Trustees of the Department of Archives and History, to discuss our idea, and he concurred that we should attempt to have the Department's capital improvement needs included in the ETV bond bill. Our next step was to call Dr. Larry Miller, the executive director of ETV. When Governor Winter and I spoke with Dr. Miller in our conference telephone call, I could sense that he was a little nervous about the possibility of our coming in at the last minute and jeopardizing the passage of his agency's bond bill. Governor Winter assured him that we would do nothing to harm his bill and that the inclusion of the Department of Archives and History preplanning project might actually help secure the passage of the ETV bill.

Having secured Dr. Miller's tacit support, we moved quickly to talk with Representative Charlie Williams, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives. Representative

Williams told Governor Winter that he would take steps to include preplanning funds for the Department of Archives and History's capital improvement plan in the ETV bond bill. It was agreed that we would request \$1.6 million to plan the construction of a new Archives and History building on state-owned land and to preplan construction of a new state history museum and the renovation of the War Memorial Building, the Charlotte Capers Building, and the Old Capitol.

John Gilbert and I were present at the Capitol when Representative Williams submitted the conference report for the ETV bond bill to the House of Representatives. His report revealed that the conference committee had included funds for three new projects---the stabilization of the bluffs at Natchez to help protect the city's historic architecture, the Department of Archives and History capital improvement plan, and a new National Guard armory for Senatobia. Representative Williams, a lifelong resident of Senatobia, presented an eloquent and well-documented justification for the new armory.

The conference report was immediately challenged by a member of the House who questioned the germaneness of the new projects that had not been included in either the House or Senate versions of the bill. Fortunately, the lunch hour was approaching, and the House was recessed before a ruling could be issued by Speaker of the House Tim Ford. I was concerned that we were on the verge of losing our projects and told John Gilbert that I would call Governor Winter when I got back to the Capers Building (I had no cell phone in 1997). I sometimes feel that it was providential that Governor Winter had not yet gone to lunch and was in his office when I called to let him know what had happened on the floor of the House a few minutes earlier. He told me that he would call Speaker Ford and that he would get back to me after he talked with the Speaker. A few minutes later, Governor Winter called back to say that he had talked with Speaker Ford and that the Speaker had told him that he was going to rule that the Natchez Bluffs and Senatobia armory projects were not germane to the bond bill, but that the Department of Archives and History capital improvement projects were germane in light of the Department's involvement with educational activities and programs. After Speaker Ford made his ruling, the House adopted the conference report for House Bill No. 1840 and sent the bill on to the Senate.

Things were moving fast, and we now had to secure the endorsement and support of Senator Hob Bryan, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. We joined Dr. Miller in calling on Senator Bryan, who assured us that we had his support and who subsequently steered the bill to passage in the Senate. The bill was signed into law by Governor Kirk Fordice; in the months to come the Bureau of Building, Grounds and Real Property Management appointed architects for the various projects, and the planning process began. ECD Architects & Engineers, a Joint Venture composed of Eley Associates/Architects, P.A.; Cooke Douglass Farr Lemons/Ltd, Architects and Engineers, P.A. and Dale and Associates Architects, P.A., were appointed to prepare plans for the new Archives and History building, which was to be constructed on the state-owned property adjacent to the intersection of North and Amite streets immediately north of the War Memorial Building. Forrest Galey, special projects officer, Archives and Library Division, joined H. T. Holmes in coordinating the Department's involvement in the planning process for the building's archival/library spaces. John Gilbert and his successor, Robert Benson, oversaw the planning for the administration spaces.

In light of the fact that the architects had never designed an archival facility, it was decided that visits to some of the recently constructed archives buildings would be in order. H. T. Holmes, John Gilbert, Forrest Galey, Linda Culberson, and I traveled on the *Southern Crescent* to Washington where we were met by Marty Ramage of Belden, who serves on the Board of Trustees of the Department of Archives and History. From our base in Washington, we journeyed out to tour the new National Archives building on the College Park campus of the University of Maryland, the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis, and the Virginia State Library in Richmond. We also visited the Delaware State Archives in Wilmington to review that institution's architectural designs for a new archives building. These visits, along

with the input of environmental consultant William H. Lull, of Garrison/Lull, Inc., Princeton Junction, New Jersey, proved to be invaluable as the architects and engineers prepared their plans for the new Archives and History building.

Later in 1997, the Department of Archives and History joined with the Federation of Mississippi Historical Societies to hold a series of nine public meetings around the state to allow interested citizens to offer suggestions about the design of the building and the services that would be offered in the new facilities. Mrs. Libby Aydelott of Clinton, who had been instrumental in the establishment of the Federation as an affiliate of the Mississippi Historical Society and in encouraging the members of the Legislature to support the Department's capital improvement plan, presided at each of the meetings. The suggestions and comments offered at the public meetings were recorded and passed along to the architects. Perhaps the most interesting public meeting occurred in Greenville where we found ourselves locked up and unable to leave the William Alexander Percy Memorial Library after the library had closed that evening. As one can imagine, this meeting was featured the following day on the front page of the *Delta Democrat Times*. This series of meetings served a dual purpose --- engaging many of the building's future patrons in the planning process and demonstrating to the state legislators that there was widespread support for the project around the state. Without the support of Mississippi's grassroots historical community, the new Archives and History building would not have been built.

As we neared the end of 1997, the decision was made to set as our top priorities the construction of the new Archives and History building and the restoration and renovation of the War Memorial Building. Although the War Memorial Building is not under the auspices of the Department of Archives and History, it is an important architectural landmark on the Old Capitol Green and a building that is associated with the history of the Department of Archives and History. Including the War Memorial Building renovation in our immediate legislative agenda brought the invaluable support of the state's military and patriotic community and helped build legislative support for the project.

In 1998, the Legislature enacted House Bill No. 1782 that authorized the issuance of \$34 million in bonds to construct the new Archives and History building, to renovate and restore the War Memorial Building, to construct a central mechanical plant to support the new Archives and History building and the existing facilities on the Old Capitol Green, and to continue planning for the new state history museum and the future renovation of the Charlotte Capers Building and the Old Capitol.

The Bureau of Building, Grounds and Real Property Management played a crucial role in overseeing the construction of the Archives and History building by W. G. Yates & Sons Construction Company. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on March 21, 2000, with Lieutenant Governor Amy Tuck, Speaker of the House Tim Ford, and Governor Winter delivering the principal addresses. At that occasion, Speaker Ford informed the audience that the Mississippi Legislature earlier that day had enacted House Bill No. 1548 to authorize the new Archives and History building to be named the "William F. Winter Archives and History Building." It is most fitting that the Mississippi Legislature voted to name the new building in honor of Governor Winter, for no one has ever been more dedicated to the Department of Archives and History. Governor Winter has served with great distinction as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Department since 1957 and as president of the Board since 1969. He has been my mentor, friend, and co-worker in helping preserve our state's history for almost four decades. He has demonstrated throughout his life those qualities and characteristics of leadership---integrity, gentility, civility, decency, kindness, humility, and a great knowledge of our state and nation's history--- that could well be emulated by every public servant. He is truly Mississippi's most outstanding senior statesman.

A great deal of thought was given to the design of the new building. In addition to providing the space needed to house the Department's archival collections and staff for many years to come, we wanted to be sure that the building was designed in a manner that would complement its setting. The architects

were responsive to the suggestions offered including the comments and observations of Senator Hob Bryan, which led to the addition of the monumental porch that enhances the beauty of the building. The building's classical design and materials relate it visually to the historic buildings of the Old Capitol Green---the Old Capitol, the War Memorial Building, and the Charlotte Capers Building. Like the War Memorial Building and the Charlotte Capers Building, the William F. Winter Archives and History Building is a modern interpretation of classical architecture, angular and with minimal ornamentation but enlivened by derived historical details that reference the older buildings on the Green.

In September 2003 the Department's invaluable archival collection was carefully moved into its new home by Mississippi Van Lines of Jackson. The new building was opened to researchers on October 27, 2003.

Approximately 1,200 persons attended the dedication of the William F. Winter Archives and History Building on November 7, 2003. Remarks were delivered by Governor Ronnie Musgrove, Lieutenant Governor Amy Tuck, Speaker of the House Tim Ford, and Speaker Pro Tempore of the House Robert G. Clark. The principal address was delivered by Governor Winter's longtime friend David Halberstam, one of our nation's most highly respected journalists and historians. In his comments, Mr. Halberstam, stated "How appropriate that it [the new building] is named after the state's best and strongest governor of modern times---strongest not in flexing his muscle or raising his voice, but in having the courage to look back and to try and deal with a difficult and often painful past. So many of our secrets are housed here. How fortunate we will be if a new generation of talented young men and women come here and study them (and study us in the process); for the less secret the past becomes, the freer we all will be."

Governor Winter echoed that last thought in his remarks by saying "History must reflect our bad times as well as our good ones, our mistakes as well as our successes, our defeats as well as our victories. It is only through a clear and honest look at our past that we are able to find the basis now and in the future to make wise judgments that will keep us from repeating the mistakes of that past. We must in short learn to be instructed by history but not imprisoned by it."

On the evening of November 7, the Mississippi Chapter of the Association of Builders and Contractors presented the W. G. Yates & Sons Construction Company a 2003 Merit Award for its construction of the William F. Winter Archives and History Building.

Since the William F. Winter Archives and History Building was opened to the public on October 27, 2003, we have had researchers from some thirty-eight states and six foreign nations. Through its funding of the new building, the Legislature has once again formally acknowledged the State's responsibility for the preservation of its documentary heritage. The strong support for this project, among both citizens and elected officials, is a testament to Mississippi's commitment to preserving and learning from the state's rich and complex history.

