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## Planning the William F. Winter Archives and History Building

by

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Archives and Library Division

The mid 1990s was both a perfect time and a dreadful time to design a new archives repository. A perfect time because we had the necessary financial support from the state legislature, we were in desperate need of storage, staff, and researcher work space, and we were in a building that severely limited adaptation to changing technology. But a dreadful time because we were in the midst of a revolution in record-keeping technology, and nobody knew which direction to go in designing a permanent archival structure.

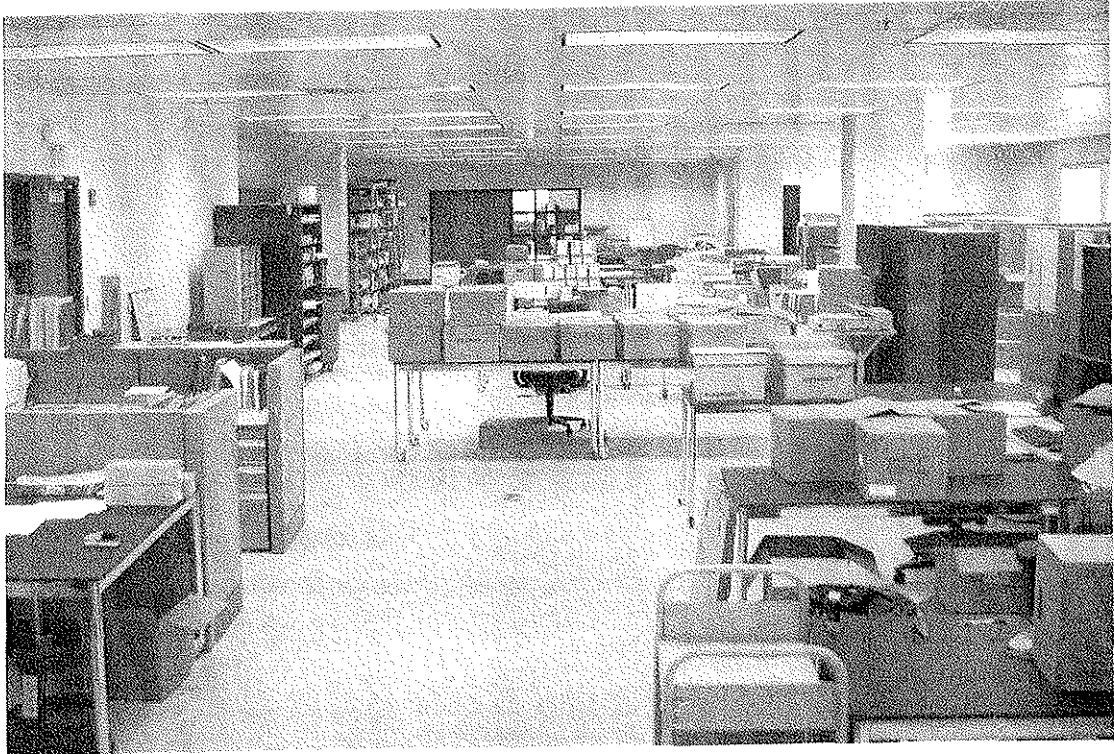
The existing archival facility, the Charlotte Capers Archives and History Building, had been designed in the late 1960s and dedicated on June 3, 1971. For Mississippi, that building represented the first total commitment to quality archival administration. Based on designs of archival facilities recently built in other states, notably Georgia, the Capers Building was a modern, up-to-date repository with climate-controlled stacks, sizable archival processing areas, and a microfilm processing area to accommodate the entire archival staff of five. The new Search Room provided space for sixteen researchers, with a separate microfilm room providing eight microfilm readers, serviced by a reference staff of four. The Capers Building was originally planned as a five-story building to contain two and one-half floors of stack space. However, budget considerations required plans to be scaled back to three floors with one and one-half floors of stack space (although there was sufficient funding to lay a foundation that could support the future addition of two floors). Space for a document conservation laboratory was designated, but funds were not available to equip the laboratory for several years. Even before the building was complete, floor plans were altered to convert some 600 square feet of stack space to office space for the young and growing Historic Sites and Archaeology Division (the historic preservation program). Nevertheless, when the building was opened to the public on June 3, 1971, Mississippians could take pride in their new archives.

Within a few years, the stack reduction decisions that had been implemented began to haunt the Department. One of the virtues of a new archives building is that its visibility attracts increased donations. Available shelf space began to disappear at such a rate that only eleven years later the State Historical Records Advisory Board recommended in its needs assessment report that "planning should be instituted to result in the construction by the year 2002 of new facilities to house the archives/records management programs of the Department of Archives and History." Only eleven years after the dedication of Mississippi's first archival repository, the need was recognized for an even larger facility.

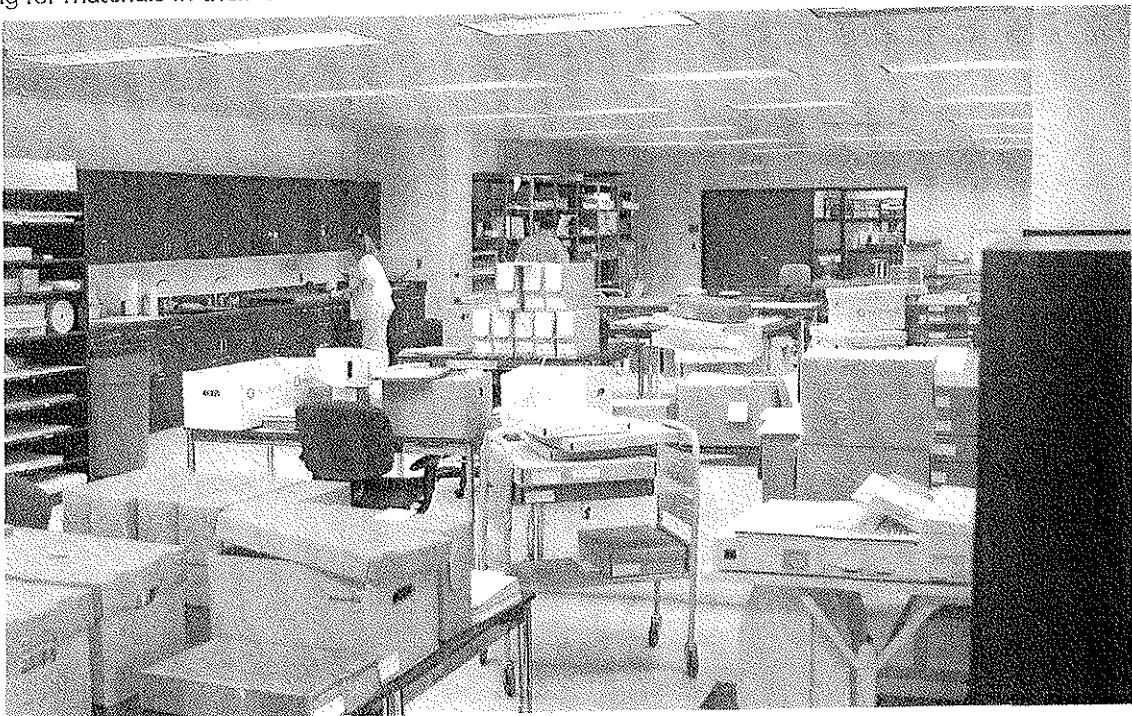
In hindsight, it seems somewhat audacious to return to the legislature after only a decade in the new building to address additional space concerns. But the director of the Department, Elbert R. Hilliard, began to do exactly that, each year speaking of our growing space needs and preparing legislators for the funding request that was bound to come. The economic recession and subsequent budget reductions in 1989 put such thoughts on hold. As the economic situation improved, the Department approached the space needs from a different perspective, requesting funding to purchase compact shelving for the third floor of the building. In 1990 the legislature approved \$500,000 in bond money for the acquisition and installation of what would end up being seven miles of compact shelving. Completed in the early 1990s, this project provided much-needed storage space relief, but did not address the lack of staff work space or researcher space. The Search Room was often overcrowded, and the Board of Trustees was forced to

### Paper Archives Suite

The Paper Archives Section occupies a suite of approximately 4,260 sq. ft. on the south/southwest corner of the second floor in the Winter Archives. Each staff member currently has a private desk space; these individual work spaces circle the exterior walls of the large, open room with tables for processing and conservation work in the center. There is also a separate work room that can be used for special projects requiring a higher level of security.



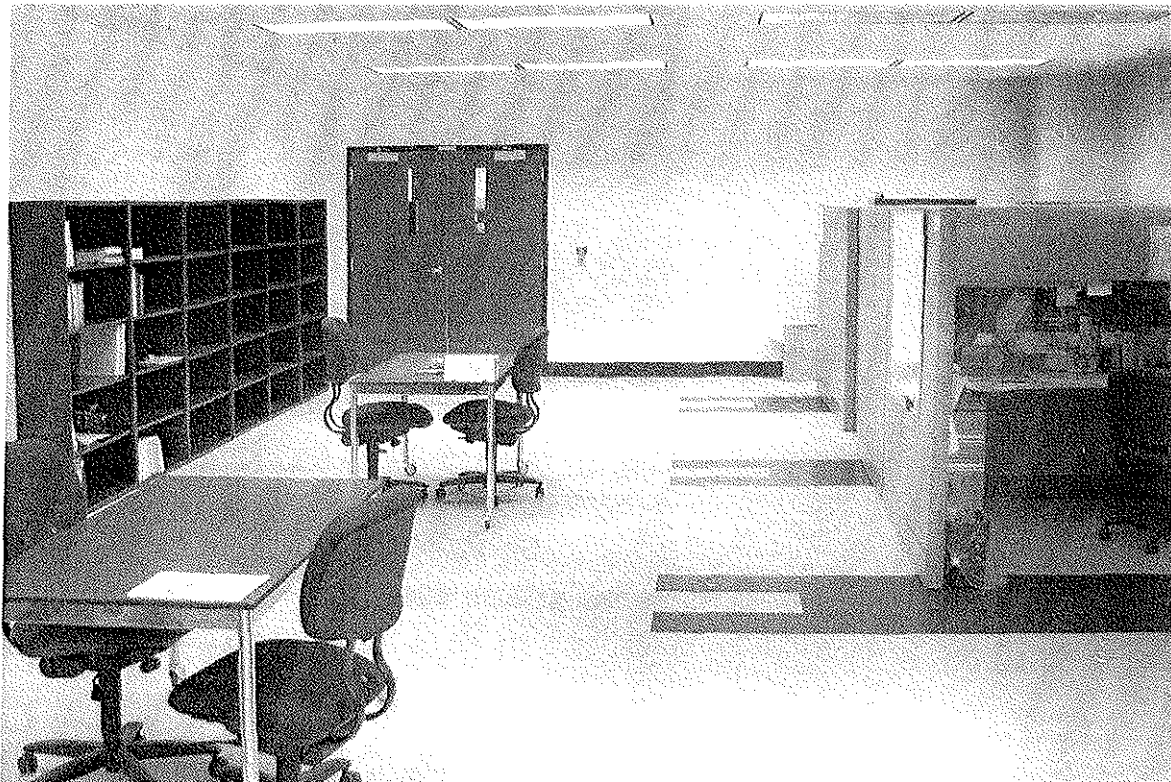
There is a special conservation work area provided to construct special housing for fragile documents. Paper Archives staff members are trained in several conservation measures including Japanese paper mending, creating folders, wraps and special housing, such as book boxes, and encapsulating documents in inert polyester to protect the documents when handling. The conservation area is a shared work space that all sections may use to prepare special housing for materials in their care.





#### Electronic Records Archives Suite

The Electronic Records Archives Section (ERA) is responsible for appraising and evaluating electronic records and resources and for acquiring, accessioning, describing, preserving, and providing access to those determined to have archival value. The ERA suite includes office space as well as a common work area and a large room for storage of media, software, manuals, and equipment. Adjacent to the storage room is the electronic records processing room, where the work of preparing archival electronic records for public access takes place. In addition to the ERA suite, the Section also maintains a server farm room located in the Winter Building's closed basement stacks.

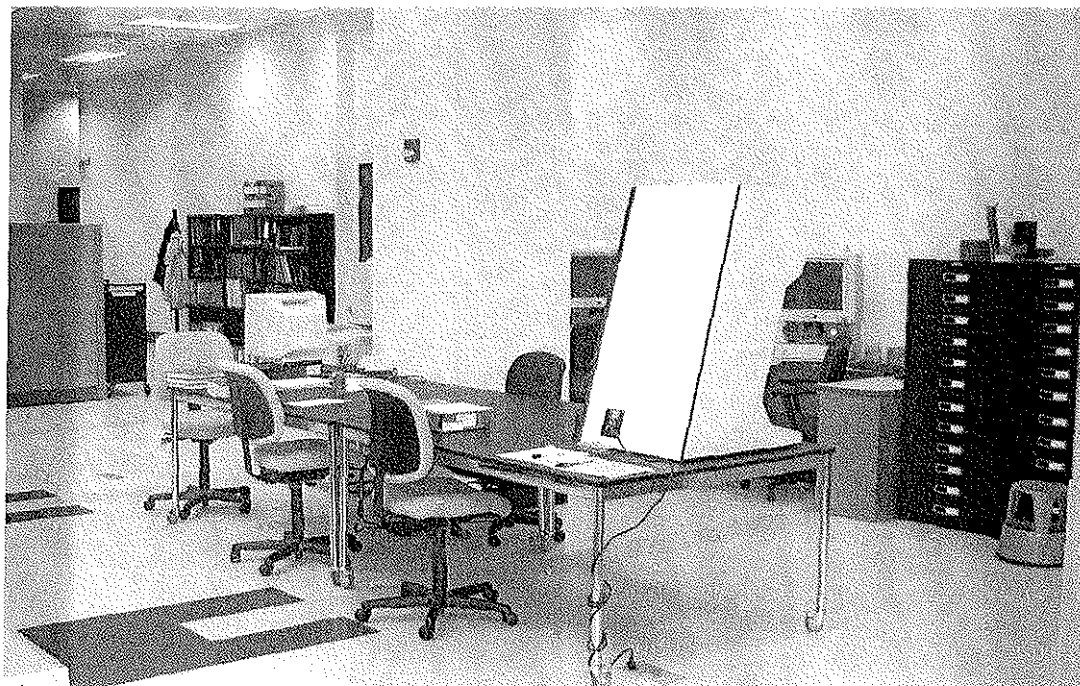
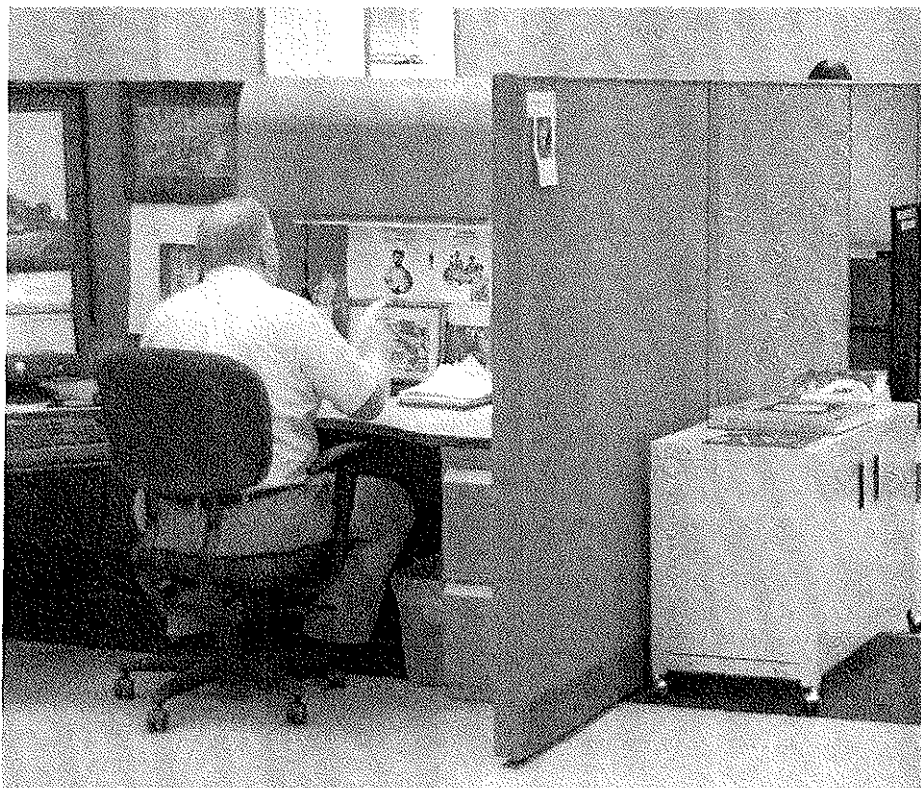




### Reference Services Section

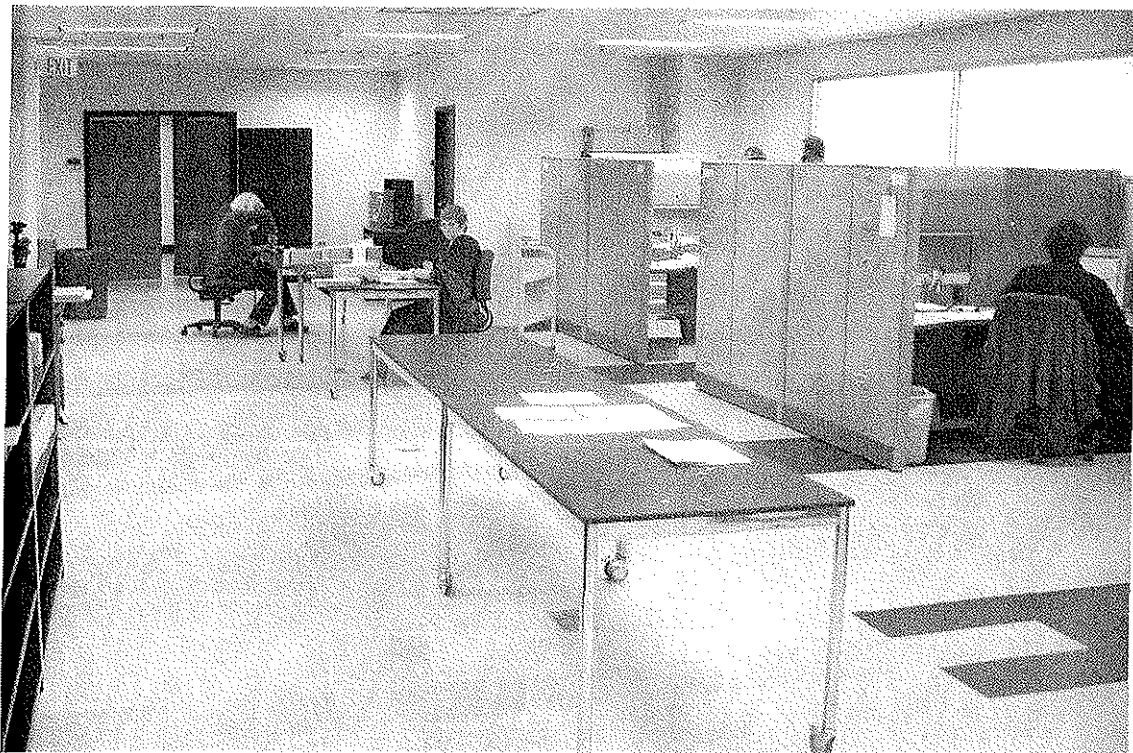
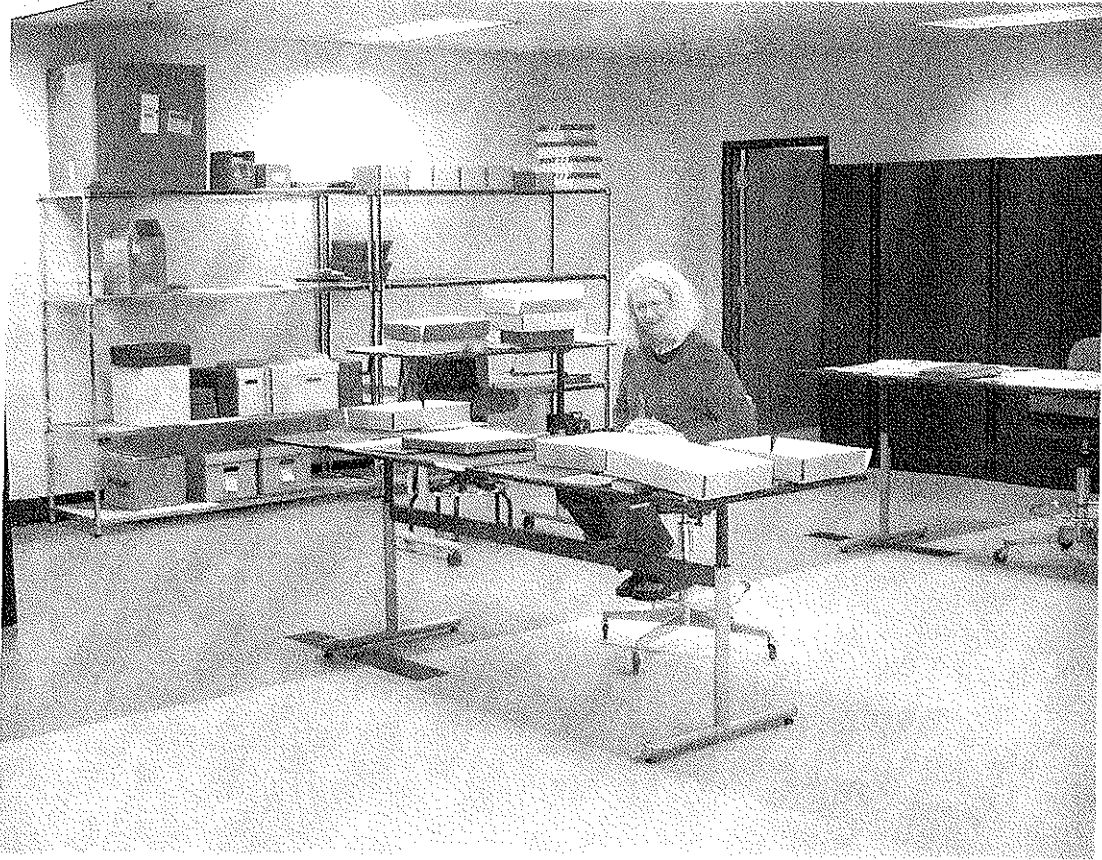
The reference services section handles all in-coming queries concerning the Department collections. These questions come from state agencies or private individuals and may involve research into state agency files, county records, census schedules, maps, photographs, newspapers, personal records or published materials.

Reference responsibilities are assigned to one of two staff groups. One group serves the individuals who come to the Department to do research. The other group responds to postal mail, email, fax and telephone queries. (None of the reference telephone calls are received in the library itself; these come to a designated telephone desk in the Reference Services suite that is manned continually during opening hours.)



### Image and Sound Section

The Image and Sound Section deals with records in photographic, audio, or motion picture format became the responsibility of the Image & Sound Section, which also assumed responsibility for archival reformatting into microform or imaged formats.



implement a limit of forty researchers in the room at any one time. The staff had also grown from the nine people in 1971 to forty in 1994 and was handling 160,000 reference transactions a year. Work spaces had geometrically shrunken. The space shortage was critical.

Serious planning of the new building began in 1995, with legislative support provided for the programming phase. During this phase MDAH staff worked with the architects to determine how to divide and organize the work and public spaces. The planning team consisted of the Archives and Library Division section heads and the directors of the Archives and Library Division and the Local Government Records Office. This planning team had a combined 120 years of archival and library experience, an average of 20 years per member. Such an experienced team was able to bring to the design table a wealth of knowledge gained by working in an inadequate building—and to identify design flaws that otherwise would have gone unnoticed until it was too late.

One of the early challenges was educating the architects about the special needs of an archival repository. While the architects on this project had no experience planning for the specialized environmental and security requirements of an archives, they listened carefully to our explanations and learned quickly. The new archives was to be a prominent downtown building. We were concerned that the architects would design a beautiful and imposing exterior first and then shape the interior to fit. So we asked the architects to hold off on the exterior design until they had developed a floor plan that worked throughout the building. The architects honored that agreement, though they had to be reminded of it occasionally through the design process.

In the spring of 1997 the architects joined the MDAH planning team for a whistle-stop tour of several facilities: the new National Archives II in College Park, Maryland; the Delaware State Archives, Dover, then in the midst of new building construction; the Maryland Hall of Records, a splendid facility built in the mid-1980s; and the brand-new Virginia State Library in Richmond. By visiting facilities of various ages and in various conditions, not only were we able to see the latest in archival planning, but we were also able to see how successful adaptations had been made to older facilities. Incidentally, traveling by train provided many hours for interaction and discussion with the architects about what we had seen and how our needs compared.

One of the most important observations we made on this trip was that despite the fact that most archives manage records in similar ways, institutional idiosyncrasies result in no single ideal archival floor plan. Some archives deal only with government records, others only with private records, still others a mix. Some archives also collect published materials and other media. Each archival plan singularly reflects each institution's role.

The design team had intended from the start to include Garrison & Lull, Inc., environmental consultants, in the planning from the start. But as planning progressed, MDAH staff became concerned that Garrison & Lull was not being included. Many months into the planning process, at our insistence, Garrison & Lull was finally brought in. As a result, significant re-planning, at considerable expense, had to be done to accommodate the firm's environmental recommendations.

During the planning phase, Forrest Galey, A&L Division special projects officer, worked with the architects on a daily basis, and the planning team on a weekly basis. Every few weeks when a significant planning step was reaching conclusion, the entire division staff was given the opportunity for review and comment. Several significant revisions were made as a result of the review by the "front line" staff.

Staff reactions to the plans were not always favorable. For example, each staff member wanted an office with a window. When the architects tried to accommodate that desire, the resulting plan was a long, narrow building with many hard-walled, windowed offices and little work space. In the end, staff members accepted work space with access to natural light but, in many cases, no windows. Still, a number of staff requests were easier to accommodate. We were coming from a small, dimly lit,

unwelcoming lobby, and we requested a bright, sunlit, spacious lobby. We were coming from a tiny, windowless staff break room, and we requested a bright, spacious break room. We were coming from an impossibly crowded archival work area, and we requested large open spaces for processing. We were coming from a small, crowded research room, and we (as well as our clientele) requested research space with breathing room. We were successful in translating each of these requests into an acceptable floor plan.

Given the uncertainty about the future of record technology, we decided to make the archival work area as flexible as possible to accommodate future building changes with minimum impact. To that end, the Archives and Library Division was reorganized. For many years, the division was composed of four sections: Reference Services (search room, mail and telephone reference), Official Records (state and local government records), Special Collections (private manuscripts, photographs, audio-visuals, and maps), and Library Services (book cataloging). In addition, in 1996 the Department had received a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to provide support for a start-up electronic records archival program and to plan how such a program would work in the new building.

We realized that programmatic organization would drive the development of a flexible floor plan and that a restructuring was needed, if only to provide for the new electronic records program. Also, we had long been concerned that items of non-traditional media (photographs, films, audiotapes, etc.) that were in government and private records were difficult to find. Also, published works retained as part of government archives or special collections remained uncataloged. We decided to reorganize based on record medium. Unique paper-based records from government and individuals became the custody of the Paper Archives Section. Records acquired in or converted to electronic format became the custody of the Electronic Records Archives Section. Records in photographic, audio, or motion picture format became the responsibility of the Image and Sound Section, which also assumed responsibility for archival reformatting into microform or imaged formats. While each of these sections deals with both government and private records in specialized formats, they also deal in common with copyright questions related to unpublished material. A fifth section was created to handle published information (traditional library holdings), cartographic records, and vertical files. Two non-programmatic sections were also created: Computer Support Services, responsible for maintenance of the communications infrastructure, and division administration.

This reorganization provided the essential floor plan for the new building. Reference Services was placed on the main floor adjacent to the reading rooms. The administration section was placed with the other department administrative offices on the third floor, and the archival sections were placed on the second floor. To provide for future space needs for any archival section, the second floor was designed in suites, any one of which can easily be enlarged by cannibalizing another.

The year 1998 was the peak planning time for the new building. Not only did we undergo staff reorganization, but we also began gathering data for specifications and costs for new building equipment. We started out with a "sky is the limit" philosophy because we had no budget at the time. Staff were requested to research cutting-edge, state-of-the art, and current equipment and technology. In addition, staffing requirements for the new building were analyzed, and requests for new staff positions were developed. As the floor plans emerged, ideas began to gel for the computerized operation of the reading rooms using the online public catalog. Budget requests of approximately \$2.8 million were pulled together for furniture and equipment and thirteen new staff positions. Although this was again a large amount of money to request from the legislature, the Department benefitted, as always, from the strong relationship director Elbert R. Hilliard and Board president William F. Winter had built with the state's elected officials. The legislature provide the appropriations for the equipment and many of the new staff positions.



When planning was essentially completed, the staff took on the task of implementing for the first time an online cataloging system. The first phase of this effort was to select the software systems, and the second phase was to complete the acquisition of the system. Once the acquisition was completed, the staff began the enormous task of converting everything – books, archives, photographs, newsfilm, etc. – to MARC format, a process begun in earnest in 2000 and completed only days before the move to the new building commenced.

Before final approval of the building plans was given, we asked a number of researchers to serve on an *ad hoc* advisory committee to review the plans and proposed policies for public access in the new building. This was a valuable process for us because many of our concerns were validated by the committee and other potential problems were brought to our attention.

By the time construction groundbreaking occurred in 1999, nearly all of the planning was completed. Our attention then turned to planning the move. With a construction timetable of thirty-six months, we had to be ready to move in February 2002. We spent this period reboxing and preparing material and determining the locations of the material in the new building. We also virtually loaded each container (on the computer, months before the actual move). The success of this virtual loading is indicative of the incredible quality of work done by the staff during this whole process: during the actual move fewer than fourteen of well over 100,000 units were loaded incorrectly, an error rate of 0.00014%. Although we were disappointed several times by postponed building completion dates, the delays allowed us to finish all of the necessary preparations before moving. After 18 months of postponements, the move from the old building to the new commenced on Friday, September 12, 2003. We had allotted fourteen days for the move, but it was completed in eight days. The department administration opened to the public in the new building on Monday, September 15, but the Archives and Library Division remained closed for six weeks, while every shelf was read and staff training sessions were held.

The library opened to the public on October 27, 2002. By the time the building was officially dedicated on November 7, several hundred patrons had already visited. We proudly welcomed these first visitors, and we look forward to welcoming many more, to Mississippi's brand new state-of-the-art archival facility.



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