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# Diverse Collections in the Mississippi University for Women Archives

Derek Webb,

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In the history of higher education in America, Mississippi University for Women (MUW) occupies a peculiar, though rarely acknowledged, position. The University's history provides uniquely fertile ground for studies of diverse groups and their interactions in institutions of higher education, but the lack of a functioning archives has long impeded such study. It was a pioneer in women's colleges, intended to serve the educational needs of all economic classes, teaching Latin and penmanship alongside dressmaking and stenography. It also offers the distinctive perspective of a college explicitly founded for white women that underwent integration in the 1960s, which is still largely unexplored in MUW's case. Finally, it is distinctive in being both the first publicly funded women's college in the United States, and also the last one. While several men's colleges, in particular The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute, were eventually compelled to admit women in the face of the Fourteenth Amendment, MUW is unique in being a women's university similarly forced to admit men. Now that the MUW Archives is again manned and operational, several significant collections addressing the diverse history of the University can be explored, including the Peyton Family Collection and the presidential papers of Charles Hogarth and James Strobel.

## **Recent Developments in the MUW Archives**

The MUW Archives contains several collections pertinent to this history, but until recently the archives has been unmanned and neglected. MUW hired a full-time archivist, Gloria Atkinson, and founded its archives in 1979, and over the next decade she accumulated many of the University's early records as well as solicited scrapbooks, social club effects, and other memorabilia from alumni. When Atkinson retired in 1991, however, the University administration was undergoing both a change in presidents and navigating one of the numerous campaigns to close the University in the legislature, and her position was left open. When, in 1993, a tornado struck the campus and damaged the roof of Orr Building, where the archives is housed, it was decided to close the archives rather than repair the roof. Subsequent storms in 1996 and 2002 further damaged the roof before it was finally repaired in the summer of 2012. The accumulation of twenty years of exposure to the elements and lack of security or climate control has not been kind to the records.

Nevertheless, some in the University recognized the value of the archives' holdings, taking measures to protect it, and the archives' fortunes have improved dramatically in recent months. Dr. Bridget Smith Pieschel, Professor of English and Director of the Center for Women's Research and Public Policy, relocated her office to Orr's still-habitable annex after the archives was closed, and from this redoubt made regular excursions into the archives to preserve the records when possible, using student interns to triage problem areas and assist the occasional researcher in accessing the records. Last fall, a new university archivist was hired part-time, and elevated to full-time status in January. The archives' governing policies were updated, a volunteer and student interns were recruited, and many of the collections re-opened to student research. Now the archives is preparing to move to a new temporary space, and will be installed in a new permanent home in the Fant Memorial Library once its renovation is completed.

## **The Peyton Collection and the Founding of the University**

MUW was founded in 1884 as the "Industrial Institute and College for the Education of White Girls in the State of Mississippi in the Arts and Sciences," a jarringly candid invocation of the school's originating purpose. It would fill a gap in the demographic needs of the state education system, for while white Mississippi boys had colleges at Oxford and Starkville, and black colleges for both sexes had already been founded at Alcorn, Jackson (Tougaloo), and Holly Springs, there were no colleges in Mississippi for white

girls to attend.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the new school was intended to serve the educational needs of girls of all economic classes, being both an "industrial institute" -- a vocational school for poorer students to learn a trade -- and a "college" for students either to gain either a normal (i.e., teacher's) degree or more generalized education in arts and sciences of the same quality as that offered by more expensive private women's colleges.<sup>2</sup> It was of special concern to the school's advocates that the University be affordable enough for the poorest students.<sup>3</sup>

The papers of Annie Coleman Peyton contain the records of one of the University's founders and provide an interesting perspective on the cause of women's education in the South in the 19th century. Peyton was a leading advocate for a public women's university in Mississippi, and her efforts led to the passage of legislation establishing the Industrial Institute and College in Columbus in 1884. The papers are part of the Peyton Collection, originally compiled by her daughter Mary Lou Peyton, who served as instructor of Mississippi history at the I. I. & C. (at this point Mississippi State College for Women) from 1938-1945. Along with papers from Mary Lou and various other family members, the collection includes Annie's memoirs, a biography of Annie written by Mary Lou titled *A Mississippi Woman*, some 220 letters, various papers on training and education, financial papers, speeches, and clippings of her many newspaper editorials signed simply "A Mississippi Woman."

Annie Coleman Peyton's papers illustrate some of the class and cultural contradictions at play in the movement to establish the I. I. & C. Though part of the national movement for women's colleges, and women's rights in general, Peyton articulates a message at times in conflict with the larger movement. While prior women's colleges were focused on the education of wealthy women, particularly in the South, Peyton argues strongly in favor of educating women from the poorer classes together with the wealthy. Included alongside her earlier work is a pamphlet by New York governor and Democratic presidential nominee Horatio Seymour on education in New York state, wherein the various colleges around the state are lauded as part of one great state university governed by a single board, dedicated to the education of all social classes in "all useful pursuits."<sup>4</sup> Peyton herself argues for industrial education in her "A Mississippi Woman" letters: "there is a Meconian [sic] cry in Mississippi for educated, practical women, to be mothers to the sons and daughters of the State. Avenues are opening, too, so that women may become bread-winners, producers instead of consumers, and the State owes it to them, and to herself, to fit them for some work in life."<sup>5</sup> In fact, the very reason she fought for a public university for women was so that the state could subsidize the education of women who would have to support themselves after college.

Rather than writing as part of the nationwide women's rights movement, Annie Peyton intentionally distanced herself from it in her speeches. While campaigning for Whitworth College to be given to the state of Mississippi to become publicly funded, for instance, she positioned herself against the movement and its most famous faces, wielding herself many of the same arguments its male detractors frequently used against it: "We appear before you not as bold, masculine, unwomanly women. Not as Susan B. Anthony or Victoria C. Woodhull might, clamoring for universal Suffrage or for the inauguration of customs that would sap the foundation of virtuous society -- but as earnest advocates of the cause of female education."<sup>6</sup> Many proponents of women's education utilized this approach to allay the fears of social conservatives,<sup>7</sup> but it is nevertheless striking to see the same tactic wielded here and note that its wielder was as successful in Mississippi as others were in Massachusetts and Ohio.

### **Racial Integration at Mississippi State College for Women**

One aspect of the school's mission was altered in 1966 when it admitted its first three African American students: Laverne Greene, Diane Hardy, and Barbara Turner. Although the integration of Mississippi universities gained worldwide attention at the time and have been widely studied in the years since, particularly the events surrounding the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in 1962, there has been to date no significant studies of the integration four years later of Mississippi's public women's college founded explicitly "for the education of white girls."<sup>8</sup>

The papers of Charles Hogarth, president from 1952 to 1977, not only comprise the single largest collection in the MUW Archives, but also include material on the racial integration of MSCW. The collection is spread across 91 boxes and comprises correspondence, reports, committee minutes, and other records from every year of his presidency. One of the rooms in which this collection is housed sustained significant damage during the interregnum, and while cleanup is ongoing a significant part of the collection remains temporarily unavailable. Nevertheless, accessible parts of the collection contain records relevant to the subject, and folder lists available in finding aids imply many additional relevant records in the boxes still to be rescued.

It is clear from the records currently available, for instance, that while the first African American students at MSCW were studiously ignored by much of the campus, the president's office was monitoring their progress with great interest. Included in President Hogarth's student files from 1966 are the correspondence and acceptance records not only of the three students who were eventually admitted, but also of the many unsuccessful applicants during the two to three years preceding them, each one assiduously noted as being likely black. Hogarth also received frequent, often weekly, updates on the grades and attendance of Greene, Hardy, and Turner.<sup>9</sup>

### **Coeducation and the Aftermath**

In 1981, Mississippi University for Women was forced to allow men admission by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The decision was confirmed the following year in a landmark, high profile decision by the United States Supreme Court, *Mississippi University for Women v. Hogan*. This change proved far more traumatic than integration, provoking a prolonged "identity crisis" within the University and frequent attempts in the legislature to close the school or fold it into Mississippi State University, with the latest attempt occurring as recently as 2010.

The transition to coeducational status and the events following it is attested in several collections in the MUW Archives, including that of President James Strobel (1977-1988). The Strobel papers, some 27 boxes of correspondence, reports, committee minutes, and news clippings focusing on the period from 1977 to 1980, are a smaller collection than Hogarth's, and there is notably less material relevant to this subject. Nevertheless, there is some fodder for research into the Hogan case and the aftermath. These records impart the perception of the Hogan case as an integral part of a larger existential threat to the University posed by the combination of falling enrollment, economic hardship, loss of identity, and a board set on closing the school. One such document titled "MUW: A Plan for Action and Reaction" notes the University's "adversities" by academic year and the action plan for dealing with them.<sup>10</sup> The Hogan case appears twice in it, along with issues like falling enrollment, budget cuts, and recommendations from the Board of Trustees to close the University. Other documents include a letter sent from the president to the alumnae urging a letter-writing campaign requesting legislation to retain MUW as a single sex institution, including talking points and contact information for politicians; materials relating to the first attempt in his administration by the board to close the school; and numerous newspaper clippings.<sup>11</sup>

The characterization of male enrollment as an "adversity" alongside declining budgets and enrollment is curious, considering that opening admissions to half of the state's population would seem to buttress, rather than further erode, enrollment. In fact, enrollment numbers indeed stabilized in the wake of the Supreme Court decision, as the statistics in the action plan itself make clear, yet the prose fails to make the connection. A February 1982 article in the *Commercial Dispatch* elsewhere in the collection, titled "Senate Committee Kills MUW Bill," further substantiates the boon to enrollment, noting that "some 280" males were already enrolled for fall semester, a significant supplement to a student body that had declined to 1500 students.

While coeducation boosted enrollment, it further endangered the University's standing with state officials.

Of particular worry to those resisting the change to coeducation was the fear that, with the University's identity as a women's university removed, the state would be inclined to dispense with it entirely.<sup>12</sup> Even some of the W's allies agreed that the University's existence lacked justification without an explicit, and exclusive, women's mission. State senator Ellis Bodron, who introduced legislation re-establishing MUW as a women's university everywhere but in the School of Nursing, admitted: "If 'the W' cannot continue as a single sex school, then I question the wisdom of its continuing at all."<sup>13</sup> In fact, recommendations from the board or legislation to close MUW or merge it with MSU would occur three times in the decade following the Hogan decision, beginning with a recommendation made that very year, and at regular intervals afterward.

### **The Future of Diverse Collections at the MUW Archives**

Once the MUW Archives moves into a new facility, attention can be turned to acquiring materials documenting the experiences of diverse students at the W. Students in history and women's studies classes have taken a particular interest in this subject, and are being marshaled by enterprising professors to conduct oral histories of such groups. One of our seniors is currently collecting oral histories of gay and lesbian students and alumni, which will be donated at the end of the 2013-2014 academic year and will be our first holdings in the area of GLBT history. Meanwhile, every year the Southern Women's Institute interviews the "Golden Girls" -- the attendees of the fifty-year class reunion -- which are kept with the archives. Beginning in 2016, that reunion will consist of alumnae who were seniors during integration, and soon after that, our first African American Golden Girls. So far, there is less interest among the students in the experiences of the first male students, but the archives is interested in pursuing the subject as a project for interns. Both the quick rise in enrollment of men and the fact that the transition to coeducation was a relatively recent event imply that interview subjects should be plentiful.

### **Conclusion**

The history of Mississippi University for Women, its students, and alumni comprise interesting subjects for research into multiple diverse groups. It was a rare avenue to a college education for poor southern girls together with young aristocrats in the postbellum South. It provides a look into racial integration from the perspective of a public women's college. It includes a unique encounter with men as a begrudged minority population under an administration that viewed their presence as an existential threat to the University. It is an opportunity to explore the experience of GLBT students at a public, former women's university in the Deep South.

Though recent history has been a dark period for higher education in general and the MUW Archives in particular, the darkest days appear to have passed. The archives is once again open, and the collections documenting this rich history are again being preserved and made accessible to researchers. As the archives makes its home in a new facility, it will begin increasing its holdings in diverse collections, enhancing its contribution to the study of diversity in higher education in the region and nation at large.

1) Neilson, Sarah. "The History of Mississippi State College for Women, Arranged According to the Presidential Administrations" (unpublished book, Columbus, MS, 1952), 5.

2) Pieschel, Bridget Smith and Stephen Robert Pieschel. *Loyal Daughters: 100 Years at Mississippi University for Women 1884-1984* (Jackson: University Press, 1984), 8.

3) e.g., Nash, Wiley. "Speech in support of Senate Bill No. 311, delivered at the Capitol before the House of Representatives on March 5th, 1884," Peyton Family papers, box 441, Mississippi University for

Women Archives.

- 4) Peyton, Annie C. "Horiatio Seymour on Higher Education," Peyton Family papers, box 441, folder 8, Mississippi University for Women Archives.
- 5) Ibid. "A State School for Girls." *The Clarion* February 18, 1884. Peyton Family papers, box 441, folder 9, Mississippi University for Women Archives.
- 6) Ibid. Speech to Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, box 441, folder 9, Mississippi University for Women Archives.
- 7) Kohn, Sheldon. *The Literary and Intellectual Impact of Mississippi's Industrial Institute and College, 1884-1920* (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 2007), 20.
- 8) That being said, there is a collection of oral interviews of the first African American students at the W conducted by MUW student Jaleesa Fields housed in the Billups-Garth Archives at Columbus-Lowndes County Public Library.
- 9) Various reports and memos. Charles Hogarth papers, box 265, folders 27-28, Mississippi University for Women Archives.
- 10) "MUW: A Plan for Action and Reaction." James Strobel papers, box 432, folder 4, Mississippi University for Women Archives.
- 11) e.g., Letter from James Strobel to Faculty, Staff, Students, and Friends of the University, January 17, 1986. James Strobel papers, box 432, folder 4, Mississippi University for Women Archives.
- 12) Vance, Mona K. "Fighting the Wave of Change: Cultural Transformation and Coeducation at Mississippi University for Women 1884-1982" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2008), 57.
- 13) Pilarski, Kenneth. Unknown title, newspaper clipping. James Strobel Papers, box 432, folder 6, Mississippi University for W

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# LGBT Literature and the Twentieth Century: Collection Highlights from the McCain Library & Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi

By Peggy Price

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## Introduction

Scholars interested in the publishing history of gay and lesbian literature will find key resources available at the McCain Library & Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi. As Curator of Special Collections, I did not set out to create a collection of LGBT materials, but as I worked with items from writers and others with Mississippi connections I noticed a fair amount of books and periodicals related to gay and lesbian topics on our shelves. Curators always hope for multifaceted research potential with the resources we obtain for our libraries, and I was pleased to discover the emerging opportunities for research in LGBT publication history and all of the possibilities for scholars of cultural studies, literature, political science, history, and many other disciplines. The purpose of this article is to highlight a few significant collections that represent and document the history of publications written by, about, and for LGBT readers. In the stacks of the Mississippiana & Rare Books collections researchers may discover one of the first novels featuring gay protagonists, *The Young and Evil* (1933), an almost complete catalog of gay pulp paperbacks by Mississippian Carl Corley, and an assortment of late-twentieth century feminist materials donated by civil rights activist Sue Sojourner which deal with lesbian issues.

## Charles Henri Ford

Native Mississippian Charles Henri Ford (1908-2002) was an openly bisexual magazine editor (*Blues, View*), writer, poet, photographer and filmmaker. While living in Columbus, MS, Ford established in 1929 the little magazine *Blues* and corresponded with significant poets and writers of the early twentieth century. Ford solicited advice from Ezra Pound and involved H.D., William Carlos Williams and many others in the project, including the writer and critic Parker Tyler. *Blues* ran for only eight issues, but the relationships Ford formed through its creation opened to him the accepting and boundary-less culture of bohemian New York and the intellectual circles forming in Paris during that time.

Charles Henri Ford left Mississippi and moved in with Parker Tyler in New York's Greenwich Village. The scene provided Ford and Tyler with the landscape for the novel they co-wrote, *The Young and Evil* (1933), in which they use a modernist, stream-of-consciousness style to capture the eclectic spirit of the neighborhood. According to Joseph Allen Boone, "As a relatively circumscribed urban space where marginal identities flourish, where sexual definitions remain fluid, and where experimentation is the norm, the Village serves as a kind of cultural laboratory for testing alternative identities in the crucial decades of the 1920s and 1930s." [1] *The Young and Evil* has become a foundational text of gay literature in that the novel features homosexual

protagonists and represents individuals comfortable operating without defined parameters surrounding their sexuality.

After American publishers rejected the novel, Ford went to Paris where he was able to find success with Obelisk Press, who published *The Young and Evil* in 1933. While in Paris he became a part of the ex-patriot community and was championed by Gertrude Stein, who provided a blurb for the novel. American customs would not allow the book into the United States for decades, making the original 1933 edition often difficult to find. The McCain Library & Archives has in its holdings a very fragile first edition of the trade issued *The Young and Evil*. Researchers may also read in McCain Library much crisper, newer versions of the text published in 1960 (Olympia Press), 1988 (Gay Presses of New York), and 1996 (Masquerade Books). For those curious about other publications related to Ford, the library houses his published works of poetry, an entire run of *Blues* in reprint, an almost complete run of his magazine *View*, a documentary film, his published diary *Water from a Bucket: a Diary, 1948-1957*, and other materials relevant to Ford's long and prolific life.

### **Carl Corley**

When Curator of Mississippiana and Rare Books Jennifer Brannock learned of gay pulp fiction writer Carl Corley's Mississippi roots (he was born in Florence, MS in 1921), she began actively acquiring his paperbacks for the McCain Library. To date, the library has in its holdings 20 of his 22 novels available for research. Corley's contributions are particularly interesting to scholar John Howard because they sometimes locate gay characters in rural settings as opposed to the urban environments typical of the genre. He writes, "...ordinarily for Corley the urban connotes evil. Though his first novels mostly take place in an idyllic Rankin County, an occasional protagonist makes a regrettable foray into the city. This lapse of judgment or, more commonly, a banishment from the Garden of Eden marks a turning point, a descent." [2]

Howard more closely examines two novels, Corley's *My Purple Winter* (Publishers Export Co., 1966) and *A Chosen World* (Pad Library, 1966), demonstrating how texts not produced as "high literature" or considered a part of the classic canon may still serve valuable research purposes. Howard is able to analyze the fictional text within the framework of his broader enterprise of studying homosexuality in the American South and remark upon similarities between anecdotes from oral histories and situations in the narrative. He discovers many autobiographical elements linked to Corley, along with issues of race and class.

Like Charles Henri Ford, Corley was also an artist but of a more practical nature. He worked as an illustrator first for the Highway Department of Mississippi and later the state of Louisiana designing maps, pamphlets and brochures. Corley used his talent to design the covers for his novels, like *Jesse: Man of the Streets*, seen here as in an installment of the McCain Library's Item of the Month: [http://www.lib.usm.edu/spcol/exhibitions/item\\_of\\_the\\_month/iom\\_nov\\_07.html](http://www.lib.usm.edu/spcol/exhibitions/item_of_the_month/iom_nov_07.html) . He was also a "physique artist," drawing in the 1950s male figures for fitness magazines, which were an early form of homoerotica. [3]

### **Sue Sojourner**

Sue and her husband Henry Lorenzi served as volunteers in the Civil Rights Movement in Holmes County, MS from 1964-1969. In 1972 they officially changed their last name to "Sojourner." Sue is a writer and photographer. Her documentary photographs from Holmes County have been on exhibit at NYU, the University of Minnesota, and

other places. Sojourner donated her collection of books with her personal papers to the University of Southern Mississippi. The collection of books and periodicals reflects the reading interests of a person actively participating in various human rights movements of the latter part of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first.

The collection of over 400 items should be of interest to scholars and students conducting research in the areas of civil rights movements, women's liberation and feminism, lesbianism and LGBT studies, poetry (especially feminist poetry), feminist literary journals, self and independent publishing in the twentieth century, and the south. The collection includes a substantial sampling of lesbian periodicals from the 1970s and 1980s such as *Lesbian Connection*, *Quest*, *Conditions*, *Feminary*, and one of the longest surviving lesbian literary journals, *Sinister Wisdom*. The donation contains works from feminist and lesbian essayists, poets and fiction writers such as Adrienne Rich, Mary Renault, Rita Mae Brown, Dorothy Allison, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Marge Piercy, and others. Feminist publishers like NAIAD, Shamelessly Hussy Press, alicejamesbooks, and Diana Press are all represented in this collection.

## **Conclusion**

These summaries of materials from Charles Henri Ford, Carl Corley, and Sue Sojourner suggest a few perhaps lesser known opportunities for research from an LGBT angle. Each of these collections of course offers possibilities beyond the limited scope of their relationship to gay and lesbian issues. Those mainly interested in LGBT materials, however, may also find useful works by and about Tennessee Williams, William Alexander Percy, and Kevin Sessums, which are available for research in the McCain Library & Archives.

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[1] Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 264.

[2] John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 201-220.

[3] Preliminary Inventory of the Carl V. Corley Papers, 1930s-1990s, Rubenstein Library, Duke University: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/corley/>

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# A Past Honored: Preserving the history of the Chinese in the Mississippi Delta

Emily Jones

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Over 130 years ago the Mississippi Delta was a stop along a sojourner's path. Those few months or years expected to spend in the region turned into decades and generations of roots being planted and families raised. Lives were lived, dreams were built and experiences were remembered. Yet time can also dash away a century of existence in a blink of an eye. What remains when people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds interact are traces of the blending of those cultures. For the Chinese in the Mississippi Delta, their presence may not be as strong as it once was but their influence and determination has been enormous.

Collecting the general history of the Mississippi Delta is a component of the mission of the Delta State University Archives & Museum. A quick turn through the processed collections available to patrons demonstrates that this mission is fulfilled but there are gaps. Women and minorities are represented alongside the men and governments that formed the Delta; oral histories document a great deal of the spoken word history passed down from generation to generation when there is little else to document a portion of this history. With this expansive goal of documenting all facets of a region's history, focusing in on a particular portion of the Delta's history is extremely helpful.

Some 15 years ago, Chinese communities in the Delta realized that their history was slipping away with each passing generation. Determined to honor the sojourner men and women who settled here, a group was formed to collect their history. Beginning with an oral history project funded through the Mississippi Humanities Council, many area Chinese were interviewed about their entire life histories. This breakthrough oral history campaign revealed amazing histories and facets of life that had never been discussed or recorded before. The oral histories introduced the idea of preserving history to many in the Chinese community who has previously preferred to keep their family histories within their families. By diligent care and promises to honor the trust these individuals placed in Delta State's Archives, a relationship of understanding and respect developed.

Building on the immensely popular oral history collection, some Chinese families decided to donate family heirlooms to the Archives. The first items donated were church histories and photographs. Although this was progress towards preserving and presenting the Chinese experience in the Mississippi Delta, it was the concentrated efforts of a few individuals within the Chinese communities that truly moved the process forward.

Today, the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum is housed on the third floor of the Charles W. Capps, Jr. Archives & Museum building on Delta State University's campus. From the story of the sojourner to the challenges faced by those who put down roots in the Delta and the generations of children who were encouraged to seek their dreams in other parts of the world, the exhibit provides visitors with a vibrant and engaging opportunity to understand the story of the Mississippi Delta's Chinese. While stores owned by Chinese families may no longer exist, doors from those stores and commodities that once lined the shelves are now on display in the museum. Photographs that document how families grew in the homes built on the back of the stores are displayed on the walls and objects share their own story of how material cultures blended together. For instance, Mahjong was a popular yet traditional game among the ladies in the Chinese communities. The special tables and Mahjong pieces are placed on display amongst photographs of modern homes and pastel colored drinking glasses. School books written in Chinese calligraphy are situated beside the King James Bible and other school books. In the Delta, the Chinese were

between black and white and through their work, play, worship and education, they found their way to create their own identity.

Frieda Quon grew up in Greenville, MS in the 1940-50s, attending the Chinese Mission Church established by the First Baptist Church there and eventually met and married John Paul Quon from Moorhead, MS. Greenville had a sizable, well-established community of Chinese groceries and merchants during this time; however, today, that community has been greatly reduced for a number of factors. Frieda recognized the significance of her family history and that of her community; with the need to preserve it as well as make it accessible, Frieda has taken on much of the responsibility of organizing current efforts to move the museum and preservation projects forward.

An oral history project conducted in 1999 demonstrates Frieda's contributions to preserving her heritage. Describing weddings between Chinese couples living in the Delta, Frieda shares, "What we did was mesh. If a couple decided to get married. Then they would do the traditional wedding just like we would. Then afterwards they would perform the Chinese traditions." [i] The challenge was not an easy one for the early families, to navigate between the dual society of the Mississippi Delta. Yet they persevered for the benefit and sake of the generations they knew would follow them.

The need to preserve is demonstrated here in a quote from the oral history interview conducted by Kimberly Lancaster and Jennifer Mitchell with Frieda Quon. Frieda recounts why and how her father came to America in the 1930s:

"[His parents] had the idea that a better life would be in America. They called the United States, Golden Mountain. So dad came, and stayed with my uncle. He learned all those things you would have to do to survive. He never did get to see his father again. The parents in Hong Kong or in China were thinking okay we are letting our child go because he is going to a better life. This was what the belief was." [ii]

Since 2010, the Delta State Archives & Museum has partnered with the City of Cleveland and the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum, Inc. to collect, document and provide access to the history and heritage of the Mississippi Delta Chinese. Through this three-way partnership, evidence of sojourner histories and the generations that followed them has grown exponentially. So much material has been collected and solid documentation has been done that three academic articles have been produced, one book is in progress and a permanent museum was opened to the public in 2012. These good works would not have been possible without the encouragement of the Chinese community and the diligence of a few who realized that "the past is a public possession which grows by being shared and belongs to those who are aware of it." [iii]

Being aware of our history is vitally important and in some cases, it is only the stories that remain. Stories have been told of a building that had been the very centerpiece of a community of people and yet, as of 2013, that building of brick and mortar no longer stands. The place where it stood is vacant. There are no marks or grooves even left in the ground to declare that the now empty lot had once held great meaning and significance. In Mississippi in the 1920s, Chinese immigrants sought to educate their children in the public schools while helping their children hold on to a portion of their Chinese culture through the language, foodways and arts. The Cleveland Chinese Mission School once stood on Highway 8 east in Cleveland as an opportunity to fulfill those dreams for Chinese Americans. It served its purpose for many years, as a bridge between cultures. However, over time, the families who had once been served by the school and the communities that fostered the need for such a place began to see the walls of separation crumble. Much like the building, the Mississippi Delta Chinese who attended that school have all but left the Delta and their impact on it is fading as the paint on a building fades in the harsh sunlight of a new day. So as not to forget and honor the sacrifices of their parents and grandparents who sought to better themselves and their generations, work is being done to preserve these histories. Passionate and dedicated leaders have risen to the challenge of rescuing history from the ruin of time. A society, sustained by the memory of its past, is fighting to remember and never forget. The Delta State University Archives & Museum is thankful

and grateful to the diligence of the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum, Inc. and to all cultures in the Delta who seek to honor their past by preserving it.

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[i] Quon, Frieda Seu. Oral history interview with Kimberly Lancaster and Jennifer Mitchell. January 12, 2000. Delta State University Archives & Museum, Cleveland, MS.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Dr. Walter Havighurst quote.

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# Visions: Art Outside the Box at the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, Mississippi

By Callie Wiygul, Graduate Research Assistant and MLIS candidate at the University of

Southern Mississippi, with

Barbara Johnson Ross, Curator of Collections, Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art

The Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, Mississippi, is the preeminent repository for the works of visionary Biloxi-born pottery master George E. Ohr (1857-1918). During his youth, Ohr was an apprentice to potter Joseph Fortune Meyer for approximately one year in New Orleans. It was during this time that he began to hone his artistic skills and to learn the mechanics of the pottery trade. After his apprenticeship, he traveled to potteries in sixteen states and numerous World's Fairs to learn about techniques and glazes. He came back from his travels and assisted Meyer once again in New Orleans at the New Orleans Art Pottery, which was formed to glaze and fire pottery for the Ladies Decorative Arts League and operated under the auspices of Tulane University. Through this combination of traveling and apprenticing, Ohr developed his own vanguard style and manipulation of the clay medium. His once unappreciated and unvalued ceramic art pieces were embraced by the art world during the latter part of the twentieth century and exhibited in such venues as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Ceramic Art and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. Converse to aesthetic notions that were pervasive during the late-nineteenth century, Ohr's whimsical and abstract ceramic masterpieces are injected with a delightful sense of humor; he did, after all, proclaim himself as "The Mad Potter of Biloxi". He is widely considered to be a pioneer of the Modernist movement, and his inimitable art pieces continue to expand the boundaries of American art as a whole. While Ohr's aesthetic originality and expert craftsmanship have been embraced only since the late-twentieth century, the Ohr O'Keefe Museum of Art stands to bear witness to a host of innovative artists for years to come. In tandem with the innovative spirit of George E. Ohr, the Museum proudly presents its newest exhibition, *Visions: Art Outside the Box*, which encompasses the self-revelatory work of five artists with deep Mississippi and Louisiana roots: Theodore Brooks, Martin Green, Charles W. St. Julien, Dr. Charles Smith and Willie White. These artists inhabit various mediums but all exemplify the visionary artistic experience of self-reflection, inventiveness, imagination and expression. This culturally rich and exceedingly diverse collection provides insight into the artistic heritage that pervades the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Like his predecessor, George Ohr, Theodore Roosevelt Brooks (1916-1996) was an artist who envisioned a life in which art and spirituality were its centrifugal forces. After years of service in the military, Brooks returned to his hometown, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to create art and collect objects, from junk to antiques. He used these objects to create mixed media pieces, some of which can be found in private collections, that are as diverse as their origins. Arguably the most obscure of the artists in the *Visions* series, Brooks sold few pieces during his lifetime, but that should not undermine his prolific artistic output. He once extolled that he created something new every day (T. C. S.- Wixon, personal communication, undated).

New Orleans-native Martin Green (1923-1987) used bright colors to create his realization of planetary landscapes and galactic visions on giant poster boards. He did not begin studying art until the age of forty-two, when he began to study with New Orleans artist Dawn Dedeaux under the tutelage of a visiting New York artist who was renting space from Dedeaux's family member. It was through this connection with Dedeaux that his stark abstract works were seen in exhibitions in both New Orleans and New York. From there, his popularity in the art world ballooned, as he joined an artists' supper club called the Secret Society Supper Club O and found a fan in Robert Tannen, a New York artist who relocated to New Orleans. Although many of his works were destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, Green's revelatory spirit lives on through the collection of Robert Tannen and Jeanne Nathan who have graciously loaned four of his pieces for

inclusion in this exhibition (D. Dedeaux, personal communication, April 7, 2013).

Charles W. St. Julien (1925-1987) studied briefly at the Philadelphia Museum of Art during his youth before returning to his native Lafayette, Louisiana. After being told by his parents that he could not study art abroad, St. Julien suffered the first of many breakdowns. Described by his sister after his death as suffering from schizophrenia, his graphite and mixed media works were noted by Mark Bercier, to whom St. Julien would later donate the contents of his studio. When Bercier visited St. Julien late in his life, he noted approximately seventy-five metal buckets all filled with crayons in one room of his home. Each bucket was filled with one specific color and was interspersed among the many 30 x 40 inch white boards on which he had drawn cubist illustrations. Julien's profound artistic sensibilities continue to provoke conversations and inspire artists years after his death (M. Bercier, personal communication, December 12, 2012).

Dr. Charles Smith was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1940. Although not a doctor in the traditional sense, Smith added the prefix *Dr.* to his name as a representation of his experiences in the "school of life"-- and rightfully so. Smith was a United States Marine during the Vietnam War, an experience that would unequivocally influence his subsequent artistic output. Smith's sculptures have been widely lauded and exhibited across the United States. Desiring to create art for minorities, Smith states that, "I'm going into the heart of Mankind-- Blacks, Whites, Hispanics-- wherever ignorance separates us I want to be there. My act is that of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. having a dream, a vision, and a hope for our people and place in this world with respect, where one is judged by character, not color." As an artist, historian and minister, Smith continues to advocate for artists and desires to inspire children to study both art and history.

Willie White (1908-2000) was a native of Cranfield, Mississippi, who lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, for most of his life. Employed as a waiter and janitor, among other trades, White began his artistic pursuits when he tried to mimic the techniques of artists he would observe in the French Quarter. Initially he used house paint, but by the 1960s he crossed mediums and began to work with felt tip markers and poster boards to create vivid iterations of still life forms such as fruits and vegetables. Later, he began to incorporate facets of his rural Mississippi childhood into his art, but also began to draw horses, dinosaurs and visions from his dreams. In addition to their inclusion in the *Visions* exhibition, his drawings can be seen in the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, Louisiana, the New Orleans Museum of Art and Intuit: The Center for Intuitive & Outsider Art in Chicago, Illinois.

Amongst the pottery of George Ohr and various art exhibitions, the Museum highlights the significance of the African-American experience in southern Mississippi during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century through the lens of craftsman Pleasant Reed at the Pleasant Reed Interpretive Center. Reed was an African-American Mississippian who settled his family from the Hattiesburg area to Biloxi in the late-nineteenth century. Reed proceeded to purchase land and build a home for his family, working as a craftsman to pay back his land debt. Although the original Reed home was destroyed during Hurricane Katrina, a replica was built and opened in 2010 on the Ohr- O'Keefe Museum of Art campus. Named the Pleasant Reed Interpretive Center, it offers visitors the opportunity to witness how an African-American family lived and succeeded during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in Biloxi. Both the *Visions* exhibition and the Pleasant Reed Interpretive Center are open to the public Tuesday- Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi. The *Visions* exhibition runs through November 20, 2013 in the Ohr O'Keefe Museum of Art's Beau Rivage Resort & Casino Gallery of African American Art.

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Clark, G., Ellison, Jr. R.A., & Hecht, E. (1989). *The mad potter of Biloxi: The art and life of George E. Ohr*. New York, NY: Abbeville.

Ellison, Jr. R.A. (2006). *George Ohr, art potter: The apostle of individuality*. London: Scala.

Encyclopedia of Louisiana. (2013). <http://www.knowla.org/entry/1377/>

Jeanne Taylor Folk Art. (2013). <http://www.jtfolkart.com/artist/dr-charles-smith/>

Kohler Foundation. (2013). <http://www.kohlerfoundation.org/preservation/major-collections/dr.-charles-smith/>

Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art. (2013). <https://www.georgeohr.org/Content.aspx?=115&P=2&C=466>

## Introduction

The [Mississippi Digital Library](#) (MDL) is dedicated to increasing the awareness of and access to the diverse and valuable resources found within Mississippi. As the collaborative digital library program for the state, the MDL partners with a range of institutions to bring together the vast amount of primary sources found in Mississippi and provide worldwide digital access to those resources. Ultimately, the MDL aims to provide a digital portal for the wealth of diversity found in and about Mississippi, and enhance collaboration between cultural heritage institutions within our great state. Working with over twenty institutions, each with a distinct focus, the MDL is as diverse as the participating institutions. Academic archives, museums, research centers, public libraries and historical societies bring unique contributions with various formats and context to the collections. From blues collections in the Delta to Hurricane Katrina collections on the Gulf, the content found in the MDL spans Mississippi history temporally as well as spatially. Furthering the research value and diversity of the collections, significant scholarly resources such as the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection and the Ulysses S. Grant Digital Collections may also be found through this distinctive discovery tool. Together, the MDL forms a veritable melting pot of cultural and historical resources for use by researchers worldwide.

## Building the Mississippi Digital Library

The Mississippi Digital Library began as a grant-funded partnership with Delta State University, the University of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi, Tougaloo College, Jackson State University and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. With funding awarded in December 2003 by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, the MDL built upon the foundation of a previous University of Southern Mississippi project, the Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive. The first and only collaboration of its kind in the state, the MDL attempted to identify and unite six institution's civil rights materials digitally online. Three years were spent identifying the primary sources to be included at each institution, digitizing the materials, creating metadata, and making the materials available online. By the end of the grant, the MDL had digitized 2,268 items and over 10,000 pages of civil rights materials. A unanimous agreement by all institutions involved determined that the MDL would continue after the grant funding and would be hosted at USM.

## Expansion

The next few years saw the expansion of the MDL, not just in member institution numbers and collection size, but in the scope of the project as well. Rather than keeping the focus limited to institutions of higher learning and civil rights, the advisory board decided to open the library up to all cultural heritage institutions and any collections that would show off the incredible scholarly resources available within the state. A dining hall record of soldier's activities during the Civil War was added from Beauvoir, the Jefferson Davis Museum and Library in Biloxi, Mississippi. Genealogy documents and an oral history from First Regional Library in Oxford, Mississippi were uploaded. Numerous other collections were identified and selected for inclusion in the MDL with topics ranging from Hurricane Katrina to the Korean War and the

students of Mississippi Gulf Park College for Women. This time period also saw the addition of the first public library, museum, community college and research center to the member institution ranks. The program now includes three museums, five public libraries, three community colleges, six universities and colleges, two research centers, and a historical society.

Diversity in the collections continues to grow exponentially as well. Our newest collection additions include the Lucy Somerville Howorth Collection from Delta State University, photographs of WWII army training camps from Camp Van Dorn, and historic photographs and documents of Clarksdale and Coahoma County, Mississippi from the Carnegie Public Library. Additionally, The University of Mississippi has added a new Mississippi postcard collection with over 370 postcards of Mississippi cities and counties, and The University of Southern Mississippi has added the S. G. Thigpen papers featuring historical materials from the seventy-eight year business of the Thigpen Hardware Company in Picayune, Mississippi.

Non Mississippi centric research collections are also growing. For example, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries partnered with the USM Geography Department to launch an interactive historical map viewer where users can overlay a historical map over a current base map to note differences over time. Additionally, The University of Mississippi's Kenneth S. Goldstein Recordings contain over 850 audio reels, documenting the folk traditions of Ireland and the United Kingdom and their influence on North American folklore and music. These collections bring international attention to Mississippi, highlighting the state as a premier research venue.

Moreover, the MDL is apt to provide training opportunities across the state. Recently, the MDL was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to host two digital preservation experts and a day long workshop for Mississippi institutions. Information was delivered on digital preservation requirements and recommendations to ensure long term access to our collections. Building on the fundamentals presented, the MDL is working towards guaranteeing long term access to our collections and ensuring the valuable research materials in Mississippi will be available not only to current researchers, but future generations of researchers as well. Educational opportunities such as workshops and training sessions help us progress as a state and foster collaboration as we move forward.

### Looking to the Future

The MDL looks forward to showcasing Mississippi's cultural heritage diversity as we continue to expand our list of participating institutions and increase the digital collections we exhibit. We believe that even the smallest cultural heritage institutions hold valuable resources, and we seek to aid them both in the digitization of their materials and by facilitating increased access to those materials. Whether assisting in grants, providing workshops for learning, or simply making their collections more discoverable, the MDL is devoted in encouraging all Mississippi cultural heritage institutions to succeed and foster statewide collaboration along the way. We encourage researchers to utilize the MDL's unified portal to Mississippi's diverse collections, and look for additional cultural heritage institutions to join our membership. Diverse collections and

institutions add to the uniqueness of the Mississippi Digital Library, and help to provide an accurate portrayal of the vast research materials available in Mississippi.