

Louisiana Archives and Manuscripts Association Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2007

LAMA News

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT GOES TO SSA

By Howard Margot

SSA 2006 in El Paso was, naturally, focused on the effects of Katrina and Rita. SSA 2007 would have to follow up on *that* story, but there was also the duty to carry on, to address some of the needs of our hundreds of archivists working outside of a disaster/recovery framework. The Annual Meeting in Oklahoma City, aided by the inauguration of Thursday sessions to accompany those on Friday, gave serious attention to both. Here, then, is a look at a few things on the minds of southwestern archivists this year.

Disaster preparedness

Two years out, are our public records and historical documents any safer from the likes of Katrina and Rita? The answer is similar to the one you'd get if you asked the Corps of Engineers about our levees and flood protection: there's great awareness, there's been some progress, but a tremendous amount remains to be accomplished if we want to survive the next such catastrophic event. Katrina made us realize that we have to think big: not merely in terms of losing a building full of records, but of losing the records in an entire city or region, explained Howard Lowell of NARA. That agency has been 'tasked' to work with FEMA, which is already in charge of coordinating the U.S. Government Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) program. COOP is concerned with assuring the redundancy of vital – and electronic – records that government needs to continue functioning in the event that the 'originals' are destroyed. Now, NARA will enable FEMA, for the first time, to also take into account historically and intellectually vital records – yes, of the paper kind – when plan-

ning disaster prevention and response. It's not yet clear that NARA will have all the human resources they'd like for this new, far-reaching role but at least we are now guaranteed to have NARA archivists officially involved in the national disaster dialogue.

Ever since the hurricanes, the Council of State Archives (CoSA) has been assessing and organizing disaster planning, figuring out what it will take to bring all states up to speed. A presidential mandate that all 50 states come up with working disaster plans that mesh with FEMA's efforts has at least been answered part-way: 80 per cent of them have some sort of plan in place. Conference attendees were treated to first-hand accounts of what states like New Mexico and Oklahoma have done to meet the federal guidelines, but not all states' planning has been as thorough as theirs. In general, the system remains at risk nation-wide due to the weakness of the relationships between planners from the local to the state level and from the state to the federal. A primary impediment to achieving this critical coordination remains, what else, lack of funding. In the meantime, the recommended course for individual archives not inherently part of the security loop is to partner if possible with larger, related institutions, preferably ones having direct links to the public authorities (read: the folks with the badges), in developing their local disaster plans. This may be the only way an organization can be (relatively) assured that its personnel will be authorized to physically access its records during a crisis. For now, the watchword is: don't hold your breath waiting for the cavalry to arrive – *saave qui peut!*

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Mundane archival survival

And speaking of funding, it continues to be, along with digital technology and processing standards, one of the things about which southwestern archivists believe they can never have too much information, or too many sessions. One (mostly) feel-good funding story demystified the process of applying for NHPRC grants. It seems that the NHPRC program officers will bend over backwards to help you out with the application (even if your institution isn't able to). Mercifully, they will let you know if your proposal has no chance of being accepted, or if at any point in the process they feel your application is too weak. The paperwork is doable but far from negligible: a marathon, not a sprint. In that context, the key to success becomes quite straightforward and reassuringly Socratic: know thyself (and thy organization's limitations!) before thou appliest, lest thou bitest off more than thou canst chew. And please, don't forget to write your representatives in Congress and remind them to actually fund the NHPRC's grant program this year – every year.

As for the brave new world of ones and zeroes, it speaks loudly that almost half of all the conference's content-based sessions touted the advantages of using the ever-widening, ever-cheaper, and ever-more-user-friendly array of digital tools and resources to create, manage, and disseminate descriptions and simulacra of archival collections. The potential of virtual exhibits is just beginning to be tapped – cascading style sheets, anyone?

Plenary speaker Mark Greene, new President of SAA, asked conference attendees to consider their diverse identities as archivists, called for more cooperation among different types of repositories, and warned against the pitfalls of trying to digitize *all* of your holdings (even though it's what the public now expects). Although he argues that diversity strengthens the profession, one identity archivists can now ill-afford to assume is that of technophobe. Since that horse is out of the barn, we had all better learn how to ride it. It's getting harder to talk about even basic aspects of archival practice whose execution isn't determined by an institution's technological reach, for example, one's approach to processing. The possibilities offered by batch processing and near-instant retrieval across a variety of fields is already exerting a strong influence on the way that individual records are processed and described: archivists are being given the flexibility to remain minimalist or to go for the item-level, as their collections and the nature of their user bases warrant. There is so much software experimentation going on out there, much or most of it open source, that an archivist will soon have little excuse for not finding an automated access system that fits a particular collection's needs and budget (free is generally considered good).

Professional goals

What, exactly, is SSA's mission? It's hard to imagine a simpler or more profound question being discussed at a professional conference. One reason that a day was added to the schedule this year, in addition to the obvious room it provides for extra presentations, is the opportunity it affords for old members to get to know each other a little better (who's going to have the guts to try all that new software if it's not recommended by someone they know and trust?), and for new members to be welcomed into the fold. But just *what* are the new members being welcomed into? For the first time, there was an opportunity for open, informal discussions about SSA's mission between and among past and current board members, officers, and the rank-and-file membership. Okay, so we do a newsletter, a website, hold an annual meeting, offer workshops, encourage mentoring (sounding familiar?); our dues are such and such and our annual budget is thus and so. Are we doing enough? Are we getting the most bang for our buck? Could we do a whole lot more with a little more money? To be continued...



Kay Bost runs slotto, flanked by plenary speaker/SAA president Mark Greene and Michael McColgin

(Cowboy) Hats off to OK City

Local Arrangements Chair Kay Bost and the entire "Krewe of OK" are to be commended and emulated for the job they did in putting their state's best foot forward. They showed a lot of pride in their heritage and the way it is being preserved and displayed. It was great to attend sessions where there was almost as much attention paid to the content of collections as to the technical and intellectual ways in which that content is managed – it was great to hear people speak enthusiastically about their *stuff*. Come on, if we aren't history buffs, what are we?

Of course, whatever the content, there is certainly something to be said for presentation. At the wonderful receptions held for us, at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum and the Oklahoma History Center (across from the

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"The End of the Trail" sculpture by James Earle Fraser 1876 - 1953, at the Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum

state Capital building), the quality and the scale of the facilities left us speechless. It just shows what can be accomplished if your state has Big Oil money. Wait a second: I thought *our* state had Big Oil money...

Acknowledgements

Scholarship (most of my airfare): LAMA.

Ghost reporters for sessions I couldn't attend: Stasia Griffin, Carol Bartels (my colleagues at the HNOC).

photos: Carol Bartels.



Above: One of a group of statues in the monument to the Oklahoma Land Rush.

Below: Clifton Theriot, Carol Mathias, Jo Jackson, Bruce Turner, Howard Margot, and Robert Schaad during slotto.



LAMA's web address
<http://www.louisianaarchivists.org>

News from LAMA Institutions

Guide to French Colonial Records at Notarial Archives Available

By Ann Wakefield

The Notarial Archives has published the "Guide to the French Colonial Records of the New Orleans Notarial Archives, 1733-1767," which was mailed to archives and libraries throughout the region. The guide is a component of a Save America's Treasures grant administered by the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded to the Notarial Archives in 2003. Written by the grant's project director, Howard Margot, the guide introduces the records for the first time to the research community with an index, sample documents and their transcriptions, and an overview of the preservation/access project.

Since the early 20th century, the folios had been bound haphazardly and inaccessibly into eight volumes. The project involved unbinding, conservation treatment, de-acidification, rehousing, indexing, and extensive study of the contents of the documents. Mr. Margot's historical note, contained in the guide, offers valuable insight into the provenance and historical context of the records. Of the 1,842 folios involved, 1,486 date from 1733 to 1767 and are therefore truly French colonial records; 356 folios bound with them are miscellaneous notarial and court records dating from 1778 to ca. 1825.

The guide is available online at www.notarialarchives.org. Institutions may request a guide by e-mail to awakefield@notarialarchives.org.

On This Day

By Pati Threatt

The McNeese Archives has created a new Internet resource to promote Southwest Louisiana's rich history. The "On This Day in Southwest Louisiana History" webpage consists of a calendar highlighting important events in SWLA history. The calendar contains at least one entry for each day of the year.

The bulk of the information included in the calendar came from a joint project between the McNeese Archives and the SWLA Historical Association. In 1998, the two groups created a wall calendar with a historical photograph for each month and an interesting fact of SWLA History for each day. McNeese Archivist Kathie Bordelon spearheaded that effort. Researchers used the Archives' extensive holdings of archival records, vertical files, photographs, and published resources to compile the entries.

The webpage uses Google™ Calendar to deliver the entries. The page opens to the current day's entry, but also provides a month's worth of future entries. The calendar is available from the Archives website at <http://library.mcneese.edu/depts/archive/calendar.htm>.

For further information, please contact Pati Threatt, Frazar Memorial Library, Box 91445, McNeese State University, Lake Charles, LA 70609. Phone 337-475-5731. Email pthreatt@mcneese.edu.

Images of Lafayette

By Jean S. Kiesel

Jean S. Kiesel, Louisiana Room Librarian at the Edith Garland Dupre Library, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, has compiled a photographic history of Lafayette, Louisiana. The book, *Lafayette, Louisiana*, was published in September by Arcadia Publishing as part of their "Images of America" series.

LSU-Shreveport digitizes oilman's family papers

By Monica R. Pels, LSU-Shreveport Archives summer intern

During the summer of 2007, the LSU-Shreveport Archives and Special Collections digitized a portion of the collection of Tom Bell, one of the most productive wildcatters in Louisiana and Texas. Bell's daughter, Nettie Lou Bell, donated the collection, which consists primarily of business records and correspondence, photographs, and theatrical playbills and programs. The digitized portion of the collection contains photographs, programs and announcements, patent information, and genealogy, and focuses on the oil industry, the Bell family, and the rural community of Vivian, Louisiana. This collection is currently available through the LOUISiana Digital Library system at www.louisianadigitallibrary.org.

William Thomas (Tom) Bell was born in 1886 in Lancaster County, South Carolina, and in his youth, he moved to Corsicana, Texas, where he worked in the oil fields. In Texas, he met Annie Elizabeth Daniel, whom he married in 1911. On their honeymoon, they moved to Vivian, Louisiana, where their first home was a two-room tent. For the next fifty years, Bell drilled over 100 wells in Louisiana and Texas, his first being the Carrie Moseley #1 near Jefferson, Texas. His wife worked with him and fired the boilers near the wells, a job that few women performed. He also invented the oil saver to prevent the leakage and waste of gas, oil, or water when swabbing a well, and the device was patented in September 1917. The Bells' only child, Nettie Lou, was active in the theater from her school days until her death in 2005. Having lived in Vivian from the early 1910s until their deaths, Tom and Annie Bell serve as a prime example of a couple working and living in an oil town turned rural community. The photographs they took and events they celebrated paint a vivid picture of Vivian in its early days and of life in the boom-and-bust days of the oil industry. Additionally, their daughter's collection of programs documents the artistic works and performances of Shreveport-based theatrical groups.

Items from the collection were selected and scanned at a high resolution. Each scanned ".tiff" file was imported into CONTENTdm Digital Collection Management Software by DiMeMa, Inc. These files were supplied with metadata, including descriptions, dates, and key subjects. From there, the files were uploaded to the LOUISiana Digital Library test server, checked by staff members, and eventually uploaded to the production server.

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Once all of the files had been uploaded and the metadata completed, the collection was published to the Digital Library server in September 2007. The software is relatively easy to use once the initial setup has been completed, and the Digital Library staff was available to answer questions.

The LSU-Shreveport Archives staff limited the digitization project to 100-150 items. Among the items digitized are a full collection inventory and separate photograph inventory, which also list items that were not digitized. With the completion of this digitization project, the LSU-Shreveport Archives is proud to offer the public a glimpse into the lives of the Tom Bell family, remarkable people who played roles in both local and regional history.



Above: Tom Bell at one of the Bell wells near Vivian, Louisiana.

Left: Looking up at the wooden derrick of the Carrie Moseley #1 well near Jefferson, Texas.

Right: Tom Bell with oilfield workers and daughter, Nettie Lou Bell, at Gray #1 well near Vivian, Louisiana.



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Dr. Robert G. Sherer, CA

Tulane University Archivist Retires

By Leon Miller

Dr. Robert G. Sherer, CA, retired as Tulane University Archivist June 30. He had been Tulane University's archivist since 1989.

Sherer received his Master's Degree in American Studies from Brown University in 1967. He then attended Yale Divinity School as a Rockefeller Fellow before earning his Ph.D. in American History in 1970 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His fields of interest included race relations, African-American history, and southern education, and led to his publishing *Subordination or Liberation? The Development of Conflicting Theories of Black Education in Nineteenth Century Alabama* in 1977 (University of Alabama Press). A lifelong activist, Sherer was present at the 1963 "March on Washington" where he heard Dr. Martin Luther King present his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Sherer chaired the Department of Social Sciences at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, from 1974 to 1989, where he received various NEH and Mellon fellowships. In 1989 he earned an MLIS with an archival concentration from the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied under Dr. David B. Gracy II. The following year Sherer became a Certified Archivist.

Sherer moved to New Orleans in 1989 to lead Tulane's university archives and quickly became an archival leader locally, regionally, and nationally. He served for many years as treasurer of the Greater New Orleans Archivists and was a member of the Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church. He was also president of the Louisiana Archives and Manuscripts Association, an Executive Board member of the Society of Southwest Archivists, and served for several years on the Certification Maintenance Committee and the Certification Appeals Board of the Academy of Certified Archivists.

For the Society of American Archivists, Sherer served on the Publications Board, Host Committee, and College and University Archives Section Steering Committee. He chaired the C&U section committee that created the 2000 revision of the College and University Archives Guidelines.

Rob (as he is known to his many friends and colleagues) and his wife Carol (a church education minister) have retired to Little Rock, Arkansas, where they plan to continue their lifelong commitment to church, civic, and political affairs.

New Reference Associate at the Amistad Research Center

by Christopher Harter

Christopher Harter is the new Reference Associate at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans. He will be coordinating the reference and public services operations at the Center, overseeing the growth of the reference collection, and assisting with public outreach.

Harter received his MLS from Indiana University in 1997. He has worked as Assistant Archivist at the Indiana Historical Society, Rare Book Cataloger at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and as a member of the reference department at Indiana University's Lilly Library.

Sergeant Robert Draughton Patrick Diary at Louisiana Tech

By Brandi Searcy

Former Louisiana Tech University President F.J Taylor recently enriched Tech's Special Collections, Manuscripts and Archives department by donating a diary and other materials belonging to a Confederate soldier who served in the fourth Louisiana Infantry during the War Between the States. All in great condition, a mid 1800s publication of the history of the U.S, a collection of the works of Shakespeare, two notebooks on Ben Pitman shorthand, photographs and several letters written by Sergeant Robert Draughton Patrick accompany the over 200 page diary.

The journal entries begin with Patrick's leaving home in Clinton, Louisiana, continue the length of his regiment's involvement in the war and end with his receiving leave orders. Written in beautiful penmanship and shorthand the diary is filled with testimonies of soldier life, both tragic and comic, providing intimate details of many skirmishes only mentioned in history books. The deprivation of the Southern people, the sinking of Yankee battle ships and the complications of soldier courting are some of the topics about which Patrick wrote while serving as a clerk in the Commissary and Quartermaster departments. As well as describing the effects of war upon those around him, Patrick also details the people and landscape of many of the towns and villages through which he wanders. Patrick's diction is impressive and his recorded thoughts reveal his vast array of changing emotions regarding the rationale for civil dispute, his role as a young soldier and his relationships with superiors.

The diary, accompanying books and photos of the Patrick family are of very high value to the university. The Special Collections, Manuscripts and Archives department at Louisiana Tech University expresses much gratitude to Dr. F. J Taylor for his donation. The materials of Robert Patrick are available for public viewing in a Civil War exhibit currently on display at the Special Collections museum on campus.

<http://www.louisianaarchivists.org>

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LAMA Newsletter

It is never too early to send in news items for the next LAMA newsletter. Deadlines are March 15 for the Spring/Summer issue and September 15 for the Fall/Winter issue. Please send items to Phyllis Kinnison, Louisiana State University, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. E-mail: pcasti1@lsu.edu.