

**The Cause Archived: Thomas Owen, the Alabama Archives, and the Shaping of Civil War  
History and Memory**

by

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## Abstract

Thomas M. Owen's foundation and directorship of the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), lasting from 1901 until 1920, overlapped with and reinforced the development of a southern, scholarly defense of the "Lost Cause" memory of the Civil War era. Owen established and directed the ADAH, the first state-supported archives department in the United States in 1901, the same year that Alabama disenfranchised African Americans. Owen's broader, public vision was that the archives would act as a disinterested, professional, administration bureau, saving both historical manuscripts and contemporary government documents. Yet from the beginning the ADAH was a Confederate repository. Historians, heritage associations, and Confederate veterans relied on the Alabama archives for primary sources, proof of military service, and pensions support, and the materials that the Owen looked for and acquired, the research efforts that he encouraged, and the publications and public programs that he inaugurated or fostered had a pro-Confederate slant. This dissertation examines the specific ways that Owen tailored the archives' acquisitions, public services, research assistance, and publications policies to further the Lost Cause.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction .....	3
1. Archival Origins: The Long Rise of Southern Record Collecting.....	17
2. The Archival Builder of Alabama.....	44
3. Owen’s Acquisitions, Part I: The General Public, the Federal Government, and Heritage Organizations .....	75
4. Owen’s Acquisitions, Part II: Records and Stories from the Old Men in Gray.....	107
5. “Grand Old Regiments”: Writing Histories of Alabama’s Confederate Units .....	140
6. Accessing the Alabama Archives: General Requests and Public Interactions .....	177
7. Research in the Early ADAH: Students, Scholars, and Professors.....	210
8. Owen Publishes, Part I: The Alabama Historical Society <i>Transactions</i> .....	233
9. Owen Publishes, Part II: Newspaper articles and <i>The Gulf States Historical Magazine</i> ....	257
10. Beyond the Archives: Owen, Public Programs, and Public History.....	283
11. The Director’s Views: Owen and the Lost Cause.....	323
References.....	353
Appendix 1. Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) Statement of Recommitment, June 23, 2020.....	397
Appendix 2. Manuscript materials donated to the ADAH, April 1901 – July 1902.....	401
Appendix 3. Potential donations of manuscript materials, March – October 1901 .....	407
Appendix 4. Images donated to the ADAH, 1901 – 1913 .....	410
Appendix 5. Thomas Owen’s letter to John Inzer .....	416

## Introduction

Had Alabamian Thomas McAdory Owen kept his nose in his law books and not founded the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH)---the first state-supported archival bureau in the nation, established in 1901---American archivists, Civil War historians, and apostles of the “Lost Cause” all would have suffered loss. Without Owen erecting, organizing, and managing a department committed to the collection of historical and contemporary papers, it is debatable how successful other pioneers could have been in fostering an American archival tradition. Without Owen employing pen, press, and personal connections to fill that department with records from Alabama’s Confederate era, our present scholarly understanding of the tumultuous 1860s would be both poorer and substantially different. Perhaps most significantly, without Owen collecting primarily pro-Confederate materials, and promoting a pro-Confederate view through the archives and its public partners, the Lost Cause memory might not have become such a part of the academic as well as popular vernacular for over a century.<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite Owen’s signal contributions to archival and historical work, positive or negative, he remains a little-known figure to historians, the subject of a single master’s thesis thirty years ago and a smattering of articles and book chapters.<sup>2</sup> In part, this stems from Owen’s early death in 1920, at the age of fifty-three. His spouse and successor, Marie Bankhead Owen, quickly shifted the ADAH’s mission from documentary accession to antiquarianism, amassing an idiosyncratic artifact collection while disdaining the acquisition of vital documents that ended

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<sup>1</sup>Alden Monroe, “Thomas Owen and the Founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History,” *Provenance* 20 (2003): 22-35.

<sup>2</sup>These include James F. Doster, “Thomas McAdory Owen,” in Clifford L. Lord, ed., *Keepers of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 97-109; Monroe, “Founding”; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, “Thomas M. Owen: Pioneer Archivist,” in *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964). The only study of Owen’s life is Mary A. Finch, “Thomas McAdory Owen: Preserver of Alabama History” (M.A. thesis, Auburn University, 1991).

up elsewhere. While later institutions such as the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) emulated Owen's best practices between the 1930s and 1950s, the once-trendsetting ADAH entered a long, troubled period.<sup>3</sup>

As the American archival profession has matured over the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the guiding lights of its earliest years have lost much of their great standing. Judged by today's archival standards, Thomas Owen can seem like a mere dilettante and his operating procedures rather crude.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, were Owen and his work more familiar to historians, he would almost certainly not receive any thanks. Rather, the casually racist and white supremacist views of his era---of which he partook as member, historian-general, and leader of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans (USCV)---would likely provoke academic historians to damn him roundly.

Owen did not see himself as biased, of course. As with other white southern male scholars of the early twentieth century, Owen believed that by collecting archival materials he was transcending narrow historical viewpoints and helping historians formulate an objective, almost scientific account of the past. Owen's faith in his own objectivity rested on the fact that his archives was a public, tax-payer-supported institution, created not by a special interest group but by a legitimate state system claiming to serve the voters. The ADAH's mandated duty was to gather and retain all Alabama records for the furtherance of good governance, accountability, and accurate history. Legally superior to local and associational white historical collectors, and

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<sup>3</sup>Robert J. Jakeman, "Marie Bankhead Owen and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1920-1955," *Provenance* 21 (January 2003): 36-65.

<sup>4</sup>Doster, "Owen."

committed to a broader public vision than any of them, the Alabama archive was, in Owen's view, incapable of bias.

We now know of course that Owen was not as objective as he pretended to be, that his goal of "letting the records speak" was in fact predicated on the expectation that they would speak in defense of the Southern Confederacy.<sup>5</sup> Nor was this expectation unfounded. Owen, a polite proponent of white southern "heritage," had a specific view of what historical records mattered, and he focused his efforts on acquiring records favorable to his world view while ignoring others. The result was that the Alabama archives, while on paper a disinterested organization, itself became a partisan collecting institution so far as history was concerned.

To be sure, Owen was not alone. Recent literature on archival work has stressed that all archives work this way to greater or lesser degrees. Archival institutions are not *tabula rasa*, mere inert storage houses filled with neutral materials. Rather, they are dynamic organizations that shape and are shaped by specific social memories through such functions as accessions, services, and publication and programming. All memories rely on records, whether tangible or intangible, for their stamina, relevancy, and appeal. Therefore, the act of preserving records, especially via state institutions, is never simply an impartial bequest to posterity. In reality, there is a direct relationship between archival collection and socio-political power. To paraphrase

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<sup>5</sup>For a larger consideration of historical objectivity, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Chief Justice John Marshall, the power to document is the power to control. Archives in this sense determine what people are allowed to remember.<sup>6</sup>

Alabama's legislature established Owen's archive at a moment when white supremacy reached its apex in Alabama through a new constitution that replaced the one written at the end of Reconstruction. With callbacks to a mythical, evil Reconstruction, the 1901 constitution disenfranchised African Americans and many whites in the wake of the state's Populist uprising. At the same time, Owen wanted the white people of Alabama to remember their Confederate past with pride and, through that remembrance, to honor it. He shaped each function of the ADAH to bring those goals about. With the Civil War era, Owen's intent for accessions was that the ADAH should gather Alabama Confederate soldiers' service records, both to support the state's pension board and to provide a basis for narrative histories. Communicating his plans through the press to groups and individuals, Owen made it clear that he was looking to acquire Confederate records first and foremost. Similarly, Owen offered public access and research assistance in his archives largely for pro-white southern, pro-Confederate queries and projects. In various publication schemes, through the ADAH, the commercial press, and the state historical society, Owen opened up new avenues for defensive writing about the Confederacy and antebellum southern society. Owen's public history work, through museum collections, site dedications, and commemorative gatherings, contributed to the popularization of what has been termed "the Lost Cause."

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<sup>6</sup>Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Antoinette Burton, *Archives Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Duke University Press, 2005); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

In the past several decades, and especially since the appearance of David Blight's *Race and Reunion* in 2001, there has been a greater scholarly appreciation of the Lost Cause as the primary lens through which many Americans—and especially white southerners--remember the war and its aftermath.<sup>7</sup> Given its long primacy in American social discourse, it is well worth delineating the Lost Cause's claims and contours. Adherents argued that disputes over constitutional issues, not slavery, caused the war. According to their view antebellum southern society benefited all members, including the enslaved. Into this tranquil kingdom had stepped northern anti-slavery agitators spreading lies that southern society was anti-democratic and that slaves were routinely mistreated. Abolitionism poisoned the political atmosphere, infecting enough Northerners to turn them against innocent Southerners. Fearing eventual enslavement themselves, white Southerners emulated the Founding Fathers by withdrawing their states from the Union. A purely defensive move, secession had been intended to protect all Southerners while upholding the principles of the Constitution. Secession in this view was never primarily a defense of slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Determined to rule white Southerners, Northerners marshaled overwhelming drafts of men, money, and materiel to crush them. Through four years of bloody war, outnumbered Confederates had fought gallantly and nobly yet hopelessly for high principles, not to enslave their fellow men. Yet all the battles they won—or claimed they ought to have won had a level playing field existed---could not alter the outcome. At the end of their ropes, white Southerners,

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<sup>7</sup>David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup>Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 11-35; Anne Sarah Rubin, "Seventy-six and Sixty-one: Confederates Remember the American Revolution," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 85-107.

never vanquished but worn-down, yielded, hoping for a generous peace settlement. Instead their worst nightmares came true. Radical Republicans turned them into serfs. For twelve years federal bayonets and martial law compelled the white South to lick the boot heels of “carpetbagger” Yankee governors, big businessmen and deluded ex-slaves working with the enemy. Under the double blows of hard war and heartless occupation, the South and its noble institutions were nearly extinguished.<sup>9</sup>

Thankfully, all had not been lost. Beaten down but unbroken, white Southerners had rallied and driven out the invaders. Their weapons had been ballots and sometimes bullets, the former cast in state and local elections, the latter used against recalcitrant freedmen and their white puppet-masters. Southern resistance, dogged and uncompromising, had finally persuaded Northerners to leave. Free at last, white Southerners had rebuilt their devastated land. They reclaimed and cleansed the polls, the courts, and the statehouse, guided African Americans back to their proper (submissive and silent) social sphere, and generally brought back the “good old days” of antebellum lore.<sup>10</sup>

Many parties helped to formulate the doctrine during the years of Reconstruction, including southern ministers, white southern women, and pro-Confederate social organizations.

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<sup>9</sup>Nolan, “Anatomy”; Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup>Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*. Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) is still a standard text on this era. See also Dan T. Carter, *When the War was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1867* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Gregory Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Michael Fitzgerald, *Urban Reconstruction: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860-1890* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); George C. Rable, *But There Was no Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); and Heather Cox Richardson, *West From Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Eventually, as historians David Blight and Gaines M. Foster have argued, a post-Reconstruction version of the Lost Cause gained national currency as Reconciliation memory. Reconciliation involved some Confederate and Union veterans mending their differences through post-bellum literary forms and joint commemorations, both of which emphasized wartime heroics and rediscovered nationalist feelings while downplaying the war's social and racial legacies. Reconciliation memory was a literal white-washing which made the common white experience the "true" and "factual" core of Civil War history. In theory, Reconciliation made North and South equal partners, but in practice, it let white Southerners get away with Jim Crow, lynching, and the political resurrection of former Confederates. The only thing white Southerners had to give up was any renewed attempt at secession, repugnant anyway to New South boosters.<sup>11</sup>

The natural pendulum swings of scholarship have raised challengers against Blight's and Foster's claims. Adam Domby, Barbara Gannon, Caroline Janney, and John Neff have been less sure of the assertions that northern and southern whites kissed and made up, or that all or even the majority of them bought into Reconciliation sentiment. These scholars contend that northern victory meant state reunion on northern political terms and cultural reunion on southern memorial terms. Northerners at best endured the Lost Cause----occasionally, they barely endured it. White supremacy, North and South, was not strong enough to make ex-Confederates quit mourning their lost society or ex-Union soldiers quit mourning their brave dead. What one

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<sup>11</sup>For religion, see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980). For women, see William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). For organizations, see Richard D. Starnes, "Forever Faithful: The Southern Historical Society and Confederate Historical Memory," *Southern Cultures* 2 (Winter 1996): 177-194; Gary W. Gallagher, "Shaping Public Memory of the Civil War: Robert E. Lee, Jubal A. Early, and Douglas Southall Freeman," in Alice Fahs & Joan Waugh, eds., *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 39-63. See also Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

old Confederate called the “Blue-Gray Gush” of Union and Confederate soldiers’ joint reunions might have cast a temporary spell of brotherhood on those who chose to attend, but most veterans kept to their sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. Northern and southern white women might join forces crusading for temperance and suffrage, but there was never rapprochement between the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and the Ladies Auxiliaries’ of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the largest veteran’s organization for Union soldiers. Because issues of race, justice, and equality were recurrent in the years of Jim Crow, Americans were never allowed to forget how much they disagreed with each other.<sup>12</sup>

If the Lost Cause or Reconciliation beliefs did not quite become the lingua franca of American public dialogue in the post-bellum period, however, these constructed memories still achieved their social conquests. One which pertained to Owen’s work---and which indeed, made his archives both necessary and possible---was the realm of academia. Ironically, the professionalization of the American history profession, beginning in 1884, was supposed to eradicate historical partisanship. Seminar-based “scientific history,” formed from research in original records from the past and taught in national learning centers, would supposedly ensure objectivity. Quite the contrary, the professionals’ consensus-based scholarship made the Lost Cause memory academically mainstream. Trained to study institutions and avoid controversy, northern and southern academics such as the students of Columbia University’s William A. Dunning---the “Dunning School”---produced studies of Reconstruction that would have pleased the thorniest ex-Confederate. They described slavery as an institution on its way out, scolded

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<sup>12</sup>Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 191; Adam Domby, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020); Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); John Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

abolitionists for provoking a needless war to end it, defended Reconstruction's enemies, and rejoiced in its downfall. Through the first half of the twentieth century, as these scholars' works gradually influenced grade school curriculum and entered into the public sphere, the Lost Cause received a new lease on life.<sup>13</sup>

Reconciliation and Lost Cause sentiment within the American academy stemmed in part from the first professionally-credentialed scholars' backgrounds: nearly to a man, they were white males. But more than that, their work reflected the archival sources they consulted, which not surprisingly, often expressed conservative white southern views. Owen contributed to the academic predominance of the Lost Cause by filling his fledgling archives with Confederate source materials that encouraged such views. Owen also encouraged and published scholarly and semi-scholarly work with strong Confederate overtones if not open biases. When other southern state governments began to form departments of archives in the early twentieth century, directly modeled on the ADAH, they took the same course. In consequence, southern historical academic research and publication based on archival sources became---and in some respects yet remains---a primary means of fortifying and spreading the Lost Cause.<sup>14</sup>

What is missing from this general discussion of southern state archives and their espousal of the Lost Cause are detailed examinations of how the archives actually operated. We know what the Lost Cause represented, we know what southern archivists and scholars thought about

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<sup>13</sup>Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant*; Novick, *That Noble Dream*.

<sup>14</sup>W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Patricia Galloway, "Archives, Power, and History: Dunbar Rowland and the Beginning of the State Archives in Mississippi (1902-1936)," *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/Summer 2006): 79-116; Bethany Leigh Johnson, "Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past: Professional History in the United States, 1896-1961" (PhD dissertation, Rice University, 2001); Robert Reynolds Simpson, "The Origin of State Departments of Archives and History in the South" (PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 1971).

it, and we know how archives-based studies disseminated it, but we have not looked at archival operations on the ground, so to speak. This is a regrettable gap in the historiography, because it corresponds with a gap in American archival writing on how the first archives directors, nearly all of them amateurs, had to learn on the job. The archival profession in the twenty-first century can draw on more than a generation of literature on technique and theory, but, there has been little examination of the practical roots of this literature. Too few historians of American archives have actually considered the day-to-day operations of the institutions they study. Moreover, there has been little to no study of American archival usage in the early twentieth century. To put it plainly, in the words of Antoinette Burton, we need more stories from the archive---in particular, more stories from southern archives.<sup>15</sup> Where better to find some of these stories than in the first official southern archive, the Alabama Department of Archives and History?

Chapter One provides an overview of southern record collecting up to Owen's time. It contends that the Civil War largely created an archival impulse in the South, and discusses the efforts of white amateur organizations and interest groups to preserve pro-Confederate wartime materials. It also notes that although those organizations and groups laid the foundations for the ADAH, they were too numerous and disjointed to sustain Confederate archives in a collective sense, forcing post-bellum state governments to take up the task.

Chapter Two introduces Thomas Owen. It traces Owen's conversion from amateur collector to archival originator and looks at the process by which he established the ADAH. Owen fully exploited his political connections to create the first state-supported archives

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<sup>15</sup>Burton, *Archives Stories*, Introduction.

department, and thus had to pay heed to southern archival traditions and public opinions as director, which meant he had to prioritize the collection of Confederate records.

The next eight chapters cover the Alabama archives' principal functions and how Owen harnessed each of them on behalf of the Lost Cause. Chapters Three and Four cover Owen's acquisitions of Confederate military records through newspaper publicity, federal government bureaus, white heritage organizations, and individual donors. Here Owen had his greatest success. By the end of his life he had collected service records for more than 90 percent of Alabama's Confederate veterans. Most of his materials came from the veterans themselves.

Chapter Five discusses Owen's vision of using the military records in turn to produce narrative histories of Alabama Confederate military units. It compares two regimental histories shaped from ADAH materials in order to consider how different veteran historians approached the same topic: military history as exemplified by units' experiences. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the degree of Lost Cause sentiment in regimental histories depended largely on the historian's intent. Some Confederate veterans were content, even eager, to go beyond the "drum and trumpets" tone of typical Civil War history.<sup>16</sup>

Chapters Six and Seven cover public access and research at the ADAH. They show that even Owen's cataloging and description protocols bore the imprimatur of the Lost Cause, and that both academic and regular users viewed the archives through the lens of that memory. Historical requests for general information, assistance, and sources were almost entirely for Lost

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<sup>16</sup>Gerald J. Prokopwicz, *All For the Regiment: The Army of the Ohio, 1861-1862* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Cause materials. The chapters tentatively suggest that the typical archives user, whatever their background, interacts with archives in a manner matching the values of founders and directors.

Chapters Eight and Nine address Owen's publication initiatives and more broadly his role in soliciting, editing, and publishing scholarly and non-scholarly writings on antebellum, wartime, and Reconstruction topics. These chapters argue that whereas Owen generally stayed moderate with the Alabama Historical Society's *Transactions* journal, he had few reservations about courting controversy with articles in his own *Gulf States Historical Magazine*. They suggest that although Owen's inclination towards the Lost Cause shows up in both his academic and popular publication venues, it was more restrained---and thereby more acceptable---in the former.

Chapter Ten touches on early twentieth century public history and the ADAH. In the archives' museum, in historic site ceremonies, and in public commemorations, Owen tended to let his metaphorical hair down. When saving old papers and promoting rigorous historical scholarship were not the main considerations, the director sounded more like an unreconstructed white Southerner. The chapter contends that Owen's public expressions of the Lost Cause were in part calculated moves to make his archives popular, but in large part revealed what he personally believed.

Chapter Eleven picks up on this point by digging into Owen's correspondence to uncover what he wrote, spoke, and thought privately about the Cause and its several aspects. As with Chapter Ten, this chapter maintains that Owen shrewdly tailored his message to suit his audience. In his intimate correspondence and his dialogue with white heritage groups, Owen

was unashamedly pro-Confederate, to the degree that he supported textbook censorship and school indoctrination. In more public spheres, Owen espoused national Reconciliation. The principal point of this chapter is that Owen was as careful and calculating with his public image as he had been when building support to establish the ADAH.

In sum, this study seeks to split the difference between the different schools of thought on Civil War memory by examining the work of one path-breaking, memory-making archivist. Thomas Owen held forth with his Lost Cause views when he judged it likely to benefit his institution, and held back when it judged it would not. He presented himself as an objective guardian to get legislative approval, funds, and cooperation from the federal government, but as an unreconstructed white Southerner built trust and credibility with donors, scholars, partners, and archival users. He gathered thousands of records with no evident documentary slant which, taken together, nonetheless strengthened the pro-Confederate points of view that dominated the white South. He kick-started American archival organization in the twentieth century by founding an archives with a pro-white southern mission to justify secession, war, and the violence that tore down Reconstruction.

Historian Adam Domby recently defined The Lost Cause as “the False Cause,” a mythology built on white supremacy, half-truths, and outright lies, designed to protect the status quo. While largely forgotten, Thomas Owen was one of the significant architects of that edifice. In so doing he created a legacy that must be acknowledged and confronted, one that should still

matter to present-day archivists and historians, at the ADAH and other institutions, striving to present a more accurate view of what really happened in the past (Appendix 1).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*.

## 1. Archival Origins: The Long Rise of Southern Record Collecting

Arthur Templeton was displeased with the Alabama state legislature. Early in February 1901, the Montgomery manufacturer learned that the legislature on the verge of establishing a new bureau---a Department of Archives and History---was set to cripple it with what he saw as a faulty superstructure. After consulting with the bureau's prospective director, Thomas Owen, the legislature had agreed that the department should have a nine-member board of trustees with oversight and review powers. That would be a mistake, Templeton told readers of the *Montgomery Advertiser* as the bill creating the department wound its way towards the governor's office for signature. Templeton liked the notion of a state-supported, separate archives department with a mandate to collect the state's papers, the first organization of its kind. Templeton also thought the board was a good idea. His reservations had to do with the number of board seats. The board should be larger, he maintained. Although "the [present] personnel...is excellent," Templeton reminded Alabamians that "the field of investigation is new, in large degree, and very wide. Should not four names be added?"<sup>1</sup>

Templeton also objected to the specific names mentioned. He pointed out that seven of the nine potential trustees for the archives and history department lacked an important connection to the past. Only two, former Confederate captain J. M. Falkner, now a railroad attorney, and the twice-wounded ex-Confederate and judge William Richardson, were Civil War veterans. Falkner and Richardson knew history intimately, Templeton believed, for they had seen it, touched it, and survived its hurricane force. There would need to be more men like that on the board, Templeton contended, if the department were to succeed, specifically more ex-

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<sup>1</sup>"For Historic Accuracy," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 22, 1901.

Confederate soldiers like Dr. John B. Gaston, Colonel John W. A. Sanford, Colonel Michael L. Woods, and General (and former governor) William C. Oates---“first-class men,” and conveniently, four in number. “Let the Board be increased,” Templeton implored, “that these gentlemen may be put in service to the great and permanent gain of the work.”<sup>2</sup>

It would do no good for the state to appoint some other “high-minded men...born too late to know the Alabama of that time.” College education, like Owen and some of the other trustees possessed, was in Templeton’s estimation less important than experiential knowledge, for “the data needed to write...history...can be found by no son of Alabama...who does not know in advance of his search what to look for.” Templeton’s four candidates, however, knew a great deal about one thing. Gaston, Sanford, Woods, and Oates were “truthful chroniclers” who before the Civil War “[had] listened at the knees of their fathers, who witnessed the silent acquiescence of their mothers, who heard...the matchless oratory of the stump, who knew the plantations, their masters at home, the overseers on duty, the ‘slaves’ at work, the hill country yeomanry in its nobility and independence. I repeat,” Templeton concluded, “without fear of contradiction, that if it be...the desire of Alabama to preserve the fifteen or twenty years of her history when [she] was at the zenith of her industrial prosperity, her moral and intellectual prowess, provision must be made...in the records of this new Department of Archives and History for the testimony of such men...”<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Owen likely would have agreed with Templeton on most of these points. Son of a Confederate veteran and active participant in and leader of a Confederate heritage group, Owen

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

valued the war era and the contributions of those Southerners who had lived through it. “There is no more wonderful and thrilling story than the history of the Confederacy,” Owen told the *Montgomery Advertiser*, “whether viewed in its entirety, or...considered in the smaller facts.” Owen vowed that his new department would collect such “facts.” Just two weeks after being named director he announced that his first mission was “to place upon enduring record the name of every one of the hundred and twenty thousand soldiers whom Alabama sent to fight for the Confederacy.”<sup>4</sup>

Where Owen differed from Templeton was that his original vision for the archives department was not as topically single-minded. Its purpose was not solely to conserve the Confederate past. As Owen explained in his first director’s bulletin, “The design of the Department...is to care for all of the activities due by the State to its archives (public records) and history. It is *not* intended to infringe upon the territory...of the several State officers, or of the State Historical Society.”<sup>5</sup> Civil War papers were important, but so were tens of thousands more generated by bureaus doing the mundane business of running present-day Alabama. Owen’s archives department would preserve all of the state’s papers, regardless of when they had been created or what matters they covered. Hence, it was not necessary to pad out the board of trustees with additional Confederate veterans. The current board, crafted to balance political interests with preservation policies, was well-suited to the work intended.

Owen triumphed with the structure of the archives’ board, but Templeton got his way with the archives’ mission. During the nineteen years that Owen directed it before his death, the

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<sup>4</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, November 13, 1910; “Alabama’s Proud History,” *Our Mountain Home*, March 20, 1901.

<sup>5</sup>*Bulletin No. 1 - The Establishment, Organization, Activities and Aspirations of the Department of Archives and History of the State of Alabama* (Montgomery: Brown, 1904), 9-10.

Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) in many ways became a Confederate historical repository. Its programs, projects, and publications---all shaped and articulated by Owen---increasingly reflected white southern memories of the Civil War and the tumultuous period that had followed. Eventually, archival preservation in Alabama, followed by initiatives in Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Arkansas, hid neither its wartime preoccupation nor its blatantly pro-Confederate orientation.<sup>6</sup>

Admittedly the Progressive, reforming pretensions of historical objectivity and government accountability that Owen enunciated in 1901 at the birth of the Alabama archives had been thin from the start. After all, that was the same year when an Alabama convention adopted a regressive state constitution that disenfranchised African Americans and poor whites while enshrining white supremacy.<sup>7</sup> A different worldview had always lurked in the background, one that saw the archives as a weapon in white Southerners' thirty-six-year-long crusade for documentary self-defense. In establishing a state agency for collecting records to be repurposed as historical weapons, Owen simply put administrative management at the service of the "Lost Cause" narrative---not altogether unwillingly. Already won over to document-based "scientific history," Owen believed that if Alabama had an archives, (white) history professors and students, (white) history and heritage associations, and (white) public servants would collectively benefit. Owen's work appeared simultaneously new and old, capacious and partisan, without any apparent dissonance.

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<sup>6</sup>Galloway, "Archives, Power, and History"; Hans Rasmussen, "Southern Progressives and the Beginning of Public History in Mississippi, 1897-1908," *Journal of Mississippi History* 70 (Summer 2008): 147-177; A.S. Salley, Jr., "Preservation of South Carolina History," *North Carolina Review* (April, 1927): 145-157; Simpson, "Origin of State Departments of Archives and History in the South."

<sup>7</sup>Sarah A. Warren, "Constitutional Convention of 1901," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, Mar. 8, 2011, accessed Apr. 17, 2020, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3030>.

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The Alabama archives took a long time to build, far beyond the legislative session that approved it or the six years of groundwork that Owen had earlier put into it. Historically and institutionally, Owen did what few had done before. Compared to Europe especially, the United States has been much slower to develop an archival tradition. National record-keeping as a function of government and a responsibility to citizens did not cross the Atlantic until well after the French Revolution. By 1810 the papers of the State, War, and Navy departments were stored in fire-proof depositories, yet most Americans of the early republic agreed with Thomas Jefferson that record duplication was “the more significant service to the nation and more valuable than preserving the originals ‘by vaults and locks.’” As Alexis de Tocqueville discovered, the obscure and the noteworthy both preferred to loan out or even give away their personal papers rather than store them. So long as multiple copies of “important” state papers were floating around freely, most citizens and leaders considered archives inconsequential.<sup>8</sup>

At the state and local levels, attitudes had been similar. Colonial and early republican Americans scarcely needed archives because they had rarely ever used them. Although legislatures and local councils had gladly preserved “land grants, deeds, wills, and licenses,” they usually dumped these materials in cellars in the buildings of their parent bureaus. Other records “that dealt with policy determination were generally regarded as private and closed to the public,” and therefore it did not matter how or where those were kept. Churches and Masonic orders often kept better records than government institutions. Again, state and local record-keepers circumvented the danger of losing major papers and colonial charters by publishing them

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<sup>8</sup>Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (University of Chicago Press, 1964), 13.

*en masse*. Only in the New England states---where the Massachusetts Historical Society was formed in 1791 to collect and preserve old documents and encourage their use in historical scholarship---and parts of the Midwest did archival preservation take more active forms.<sup>9</sup>

In the southern states to the turn of the twentieth century, archives had been conspicuous only in their near absence, at least if the horrified tales of Owen's contemporaries can be believed. Arguing for a vigorous southern archival tradition, Philip Hamer and J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton discovered that from the time of the Jamestown settlement, Southerners had produced surprisingly few records proportionate to their region's size, and apart from colonial charters generally had not taken care of what they did produce. Sparsely settled compared to New England, the southern colonies took much longer to form large paper-producing organizations. Because southern state capitals moved frequently many records were lost on the road. The constant advance of the antebellum southwestern cotton frontier uprooted Southerners before they had been settled long enough to think about forming and maintaining archives. Add to all this the ever-present dangers of fire, near-tropical heat and dampness, a tendency to thoughtlessly dispose of unused papers, and sales to souvenir collectors (and Yankee peddlers), and the only wonder was that there had been any records left in the South when eleven of its states had seceded.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>G. Philip Bauer, "Public Archives in the United States," in William B. Haseltine & Donald R. McNeil, eds., *In Support of Clio: Essays in Memory of Hebert A. Kellar* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958), 50-51; Lucile Kane, "Manuscript Collecting," in *ibid*, 29-48; Lucile Kane, "Collecting Policies of the Minnesota Historical Society: 1849-1952," *American Archivist* 16 (April, 1953): 127-136.

<sup>10</sup>Philip M. Hamer, "The Records of Southern History," *Journal of Southern History* 5 (February, 1939): 3-17; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "Three Centuries of Southern Records, 1607-1907," *Journal of Southern History* 10 (February, 1944): 3-36; David D. Van Tassel and James A. Tinsley, "Historical Organizations as Aids to History," in *In Support of Clio*, 127-152.

When the Civil War erupted, according to Eric Stoykovich's telling, it quickly became a struggle over archival physical integrity. Government records in the two American nation-states ballooned as a byproduct of recruiting, organizing, and arming three million men of war. Moreover, both sides recognized that so long as their opponent's archives were physically intact, so too would remain the governments and armies those archives kept running. Confederate leaders sought to protect their archives by fortifying the cities that housed them or by relocating the papers. Union leaders aimed to get their hands on their enemy's archives. Every time they were successful they had secured useful intelligence, while simultaneously robbing Confederate organizations of internal maintenance data.<sup>11</sup>

Constant transfers to keep documents out of the clutches of Yankee invaders doubled difficulties for Confederate record keepers. With no safe spaces where they could be kept, existing archives unspooled across the southern countryside while other records were either never created or else were never systematically organized. Vital data such as exactly who was in the army became virtually unknown. Confederate record keepers often found that they had to reconstitute from scratch any information they were responsible for preserving. For example, Captain William Henry Fowler, appointed superintendent of Alabama's wartime records, had begged the state's Confederate officers to send him "complete lists, from the beginning...showing the name, rank, age, description, residence---place, date, and term of enlistment" of all Alabamians in Confederate service, plus details on "when, where, and how service terminated---meritorious acts of individuals...alterations and changes in commands or officers---notes [on those who] have been wounded, captured, died from disease or killed, and

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<sup>11</sup>Eric C. Stoykovich, "Public Records in War: Toward an Archival History of the American Civil War," *American Archivist* 80 (Spring/Summer 2017): 135-162.

when and where---promotions, resignations, discharges, transfers, permanent desertions, and...succinct narratives of organization, service, marches, battles, incidents &c.” In other words, Fowler sought a laundry list of details on more than 100,000 men serving in more than 114 different military units stationed across hundreds of miles of front. Fowler himself had acknowledged that “the delay in...commencement, the sad want of systematic records...the loss of rolls, and the numerous changes and vicissitudes of organization” made his task nearly impossible.<sup>12</sup>

As “hard war,” embodied in deliberate destruction and exacerbation of internal distresses, became Union policy as a way of breaking Confederate resistance, white Southerners imagined that archives could tighten the bonds of their cause. In wartime Montgomery, Alabama, a citizens’ committee soliciting contributions for the war effort had held out the promise that those who loyally sacrificed would find their names “enrolled amongst the archives of the country, as [those] who aided their country in her great...struggle for liberty and independence.” A poem in a Greensboro newspaper likewise depicted government document cubbyholes as a sort of Valhalla: “In the nation’s old archives enroll their proud name / in the hearts of their countrymen still live their fame.”<sup>13</sup>

Confederate archives also defined loyal citizenship. Alabama Confederate Senator Clement C. Clay wanted all “outrages perpetrated by the United States” during the war “to be

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid; “Office Superintendent of Army Records,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 28, 1864. For a list of Alabama’s Confederate units see Joseph H. Crute, Jr., *Units of the Confederate States Army* (Gaithersburg, MD: Old Soldier Books, 1987), 1-40.

<sup>13</sup>“The Last Call,” *Montgomery Daily Post*, July 10, 1861; “Brave Alabamians,” *Alabama Beacon*, February 27, 1863. The *Beacon*’s use of the word in this context suggests that white Southerners often classified “archives” as memorial as well as documentary assemblages. Stoykovich, “Public Records,” helpfully notes that in the Civil War era, “archives” could mean either one-of-a-kind manuscript collections or multiple reprints of sources.

preserved among the public archives.” More damnable for their actions were fellow Southerners who had stood by the Union. Amongst these “Southern Traitors,” according to the *Montgomery Weekly Mail*, were 170 current United States naval officers of Southern birth. “We trust,” editors for the paper remarked, “that the list of those officers...will be...preserved and perpetuated in the archives of every Southern State---that generations yet unborn may make them a hissing and a by-word along all the tide of time.”<sup>14</sup>

By the bitter end, pride in the Confederacy and hatred of Yankees and southern turncoats had been subsumed by unimaginable sufferings. The only records thought to be worth preserving were those that showed how bleak everything had become. “[Our] retrospect is buried with human gore,” an editorial in the bleak winter of 1864 had sighed, “and its vast archives [are] filled with the sad and solemn vibrations of broken hopes, ruined fortunes, and bleeding hearts.”<sup>15</sup>

Over four years of war Union armies seized every southern state capital, dispersing archives whenever they did not ransack and destroy them. The crowning success for Union armies was the capture of the Confederate national archival seat at Richmond, Virginia, in April 1865. Untold numbers of documents vanished in a conflagration started by retreating Confederates or during the subsequent pursuit to Appomattox. Yet not all the archives had gone up in smoke. That spring and early summer, Union soldiers packed up at least 40 boxes of records in Richmond and North Carolina and sent them back to Washington, D.C. According to one witness, although most of the boxes “were in [a] cellar---a dark, dismal spot” where

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<sup>14</sup>*Democratic Watchtower*, October 7, 1862; “Southern Traitors,” *Montgomery Weekly Mail*, December 10, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> “The War (Number 1),” *Montgomery Daily Mail*, November 23, 1864.

dampness and decay would in time have ruined them, they had reeked of the preservative camphor, suggesting that Confederate leaders wanted them to last. Inscriptions on the boxes---“‘War Department-proper’...‘Papers and Books-General Lee-Headquarters’...‘Rolls of Regiments’...‘Records of Rosters of Regiments and Battalions’...‘Appointment Office’...‘Provost Marshal’”---testified to Confederates’ capacity to organize for a modern, bureaucratic conflict even if not necessarily their ability to win it.<sup>16</sup>

Secure in the receptacles of the United States federal government, the captured Confederate archives served the victor’s justice. Everyone, North and South, expected that the Radical wing of the Republican Party would use them to prove Confederate leaders’ complicity in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The archives might also disclose the identities of wealthy southerners “who have done all in their power to bolster up the Southern Confederacy,” to say nothing of conspiracies hatched by pro-Confederate “Copperheads” on the Northern home front---two groups that the Radical Republicans had wanted to punish harshly. It was not long before government researchers concluded that the Confederate archives furnished no “smoking gun” on Lincoln’s killing or the Copperheads. On the other hand, there was information showing individual white Southerners’ dealings with the treasury and interior departments of the late rebel government. Investigators for the Southern Claims Commission, set up to reimburse

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<sup>16</sup>Stoykovich, “Public Records in War”; “Confederate Archives,” *Montgomery Daily Mail*, June 14, 1865; “Rebel Archives,” *Alabama Beacon*, July 28, 1865; Keith S. Bohannon, “‘Many Valuable Records and Documents Were Lost to History’: The Destruction of Confederate Military Records during the Appomattox Campaign,” in Caroline E. Janney, ed., *Petersburg to Appomattox: The End of the War in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 170-191.

southern Unionists for damages, employed these Confederate government records to squelch claims by ex-Confederates posing as loyalists.<sup>17</sup>

Not that the Radical Republicans had quit looking for archival rope with which to hang former Confederates. During the summer of 1872, rumors of a “missing” Confederate archive centered on a cache of papers supposedly spirited out a Canadian vault. Known informally as the Pickett Papers, after T. J. Pickett, the one-time Confederate agent to Mexico who brokered their sale to the federal government, these documents purportedly proved that the Confederate and Canadian dominion governments had cooperated during the war, and that failed Confederate terrorism strikes against Northern cities in 1864 had originated on Canadian soil. The mysterious Pickett walked away with \$75,000 for his part in the transfer, telling the few who would listen that his profit was long-overdue back pay denied him by former Confederate cabinet member Judah P. Benjamin, “that wily Hebrew.” Pickett described the papers correctly as routine state department receipts containing nothing damning about the Confederate government’s international relations. The only people who would be disadvantaged by the federal government’s use of the Pickett Papers were “those who threw up their caps for Jeff. Davis and shouted death to the Yankees during the war, and now...perjure their souls by swearing that they were always ‘trooly loil [sic]’”---once again, meaning those trying to defraud the Southern Claims Commission. Several Federal officials, including President Ulysses S. Grant, nonetheless dismissed Pickett’s archives as a parcel of fakes, and even some Republican press outlets thought the papers were not worth the price paid for them. One Alabama

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<sup>17</sup>Yael A. Sternhell, “The Afterlives of a Confederate Archive: Civil War Documents and the Making of Sectional Reconciliation,” *Journal of American History* 102 (March 2016): 1025-1050; “Rebel Archives,” *Alabama Beacon*, July 28, 1865; *Montgomery Daily Mail*, August 11, 1864; *Montgomery Daily Post*, June 29, 1865; “The Confederate Archives,” *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, October 10, 1877.

newspaper carped that the Pickett Papers money should have liquidated a large chunk of the public debt instead.<sup>18</sup>

During the immediate post-bellum years, many white Southerners began to argue that the Republican-controlled federal government was criminally careless with archival records when it was not maliciously destructive of them. Critics accused General Adam Badeau and other aides to Grant of pilfering Union wartime records in order to guarantee their boss' 1872 re-election. "If [the Pickett papers] are worth \$75,000," the *Marion Commonwealth* asked sarcastically, "what is the worth of four cartloads of union archives which Badeau took from the War Department?" Southern newspapers approvingly reprinted the harangues of Ohio's Copperhead Congressman George H. Pendleton, who urged, "Go to the War Department---and see the mutilated archives and ask why they were destroyed?" No innocent, victimized bureau, the War Department itself was said to have become honeycombed with corrupt paper-shufflers, all loyal to wartime secretary Edwin M. Stanton, into whose hands they had pressed unauthorized copies of documents concerning "courts martial, the conduct of prominent officers in the army, the intrigue of politician and military aspirants," or "the rascality of Government contractors."<sup>19</sup> In the fervid climate of Reconstruction, where federal occupation of the defeated South provided daily fodder for southern accusations of graft, swindle, and corruption, archival tampering was one more crime to lodge against the Yankees.

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<sup>18</sup>*Mobile Weekly Tribune*, July 20, 1872; "Pickett's Archives," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 21, 1872; *Our Mountain Home*, July 31, 1872; *Eufaula Daily Times*, August 7 and 18, 1872. The first Alabama paper to reference the sale, the *Selma Dollar Times*, July 16, 1872, asserted that the papers would be used for southern claims litigation.

<sup>19</sup>"The Stolen War Records," *Pickens County Herald and West Alabamian*, July 3, 1872; *Marion Commonwealth*, September 26, 1872; *Eufaula Daily Times*, September 3, 1872; "Great Speech of George H. Pendleton," *Jacksonville Republican*, August 1, 1868; *Jacksonville Republican*, June 28, 1873.

More disturbing to white Southerners had been rumors that the captured Confederate archives were being wantonly mutilated. Zebulon Vance, the wartime governor of North Carolina re-elected to the office in 1876, complained that the state's adjutant general reports had been altered to prove Confederate maltreatment of Union prisoners-of-war, then forwarded for propaganda purposes to Vance's Republican opponent. Northern Democrats had long believed that choice tidbits from the captured archives---doctored or taken out of context---were regularly disseminated as campaign literature to the Republican faithful. Moreover, there were insinuations that circumstantial archival evidence identifying Union war hero-turned-congressman General John "Black Jack" Logan as a one-time recruiter for the Confederate army had been expunged. When the federal government was not altering the rebel government's records it was allegedly disposing of them through black markets. A Tusculum newspaper had it from an inside source that War Department workers had made good money selling off Confederate papers to Southern Claims Commissioners. How else, the newspapers' editors had wondered, could "certain clerks who have had access to rebel archives live in brown stone fronts and keep horses and carriages on a salary of \$1600 a year"?<sup>20</sup>

It had further worried white Southerners that the federal government kept putting off the day when the captured archives would become publicly available. Whereas the *Times-Argus* had reported hopefully in the summer of 1869 that "the archives of the Confederate government...are soon to be thrown open to the public under certain restrictions," eight years later the War Department allegedly still kept them out of sight. A Washington correspondent for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, who had briefly perused the archives, reassured his readers that contrary

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<sup>20</sup>"Don Cameron and Gov. Vance," *Times-Argus*, April 13, 1877; *Opelika Times*, July 9, 1880; "Confederate Records," *North Alabamian*, May 13, 1881.

to their accusations, the papers were not in disarray, “hav[ing] been carefully arranged and...packed away from view.” He added that the government was nervous about revealing the incendiary content of some Confederate records: “They are full of unwritten history, and the secretaries of war...fear that [publishing them] might revive the old war feeling and bring forth secrets which should have died...” Perhaps ex-Confederate Senator Benjamin H. Hill had known some of these troubling secrets when he mused that “the most important Confederate archives, containing the reason, the philosophy, the explanations of Confederate actions and history and motives, are not accessible...They have not come to light, and it were well for some...deluded people if they never do come to light.”<sup>21</sup>

That regular reporters could look at the Confederate archives proved that access was not as tightly regulated as the rumors had it. Aware of the negative publicity, Adjutant General of the United States Army E. D. Townsend tried to soothe southern anxieties with a long interview reprinted in the *Troy Messenger* in the spring of 1878. Townsend insisted that “concealment is not the [government’s] purpose.” Ex-Confederates such as John Singleton Mosby, Zebulon Vance, and former postmaster general John Reagan had all recently been granted permission to see specific records. A few months hence selected portions of the archives would be printed for public consumption. “Any respectable person or editor gets access,” Townsend asserted, “whenever desired, to all but a few documents,” which meant that practically speaking, only Southern Claims hucksters had been shut out. To white Southerners, however, anything less than free and unrestricted archival access indicated bad faith. Former Confederate General

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<sup>21</sup>*The Times-Argus*, July 14, 1869; “Confederate Relics,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 9, 1877; “Notes on the Situation, No. IX,” *Jacksonville Republican*, August 24, 1867. Contrast the correspondent’s claim of tidy archival arrangement with the later public decision of Assistant Attorney General John B. Colton to halt southern claims payments due in part to the “chaotic state” of the Confederate archives, “Southern War Claims,” *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, June 17, 1891.

Dabney H. Maury demanded that the War Department open its repository doors at once, because “if public money is to be appropriated for the publication of captured documents, representative Confederates should be allowed to inspect the originals of their own reports.”<sup>22</sup>

Maury represented the Southern Historical Society (SHS), a self-exoneration association comprised of ex-Confederate statesmen and military officers, many with spotty wartime records. Collectively irreconcilable to Confederate defeat, bending wartime documents to the service of the defeated Confederate cause---and willing to manufacture documents when they were not immediately available---most members of the SHS nonetheless understood they must tread carefully while Reconstruction was still ongoing. Strident demands for archival access in Washington were one way to advance the society’s interests. Once the War Department invited the SHS to view parts of the Confederate archives, so long as the organization freely offered supplementary material, it became possible for its spokesmen to claim limited victory. As part of this behind-the-scenes collaboration, albeit disguised as tending their own gardens, the SHS had also urged white Southerners to quit waiting for Washington and start gathering their own materials for the Confederacy’s written defense. “This is the work we now attempt,” the SHS announced in one of its first public notices, “to construct the archives in which shall be collected these memories to serve for future history.” All pertinent material “will need to be industriously classified and arranged, and finally deposited [with] the society, under the care of appropriate guardians.” Some white Southerners now recognized that their region’s historically haphazard approach to record collection and maintenance would have to change; already too many precious

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<sup>22</sup> *Pickens County Herald and West Alabamian*, April 3, 1878; “Rebel Archives,” *Troy Messenger*, April 11, 1878; “The Confederate Archives,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 12, 1877. Northern governors and Union veterans suffered similar headaches trying to secure copies of their states’ war records from the War Department, David Van Tassel, *Recording America’s Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), 152.

documents had been lost to laziness and Yankee marauders. Rather, “funds raised as initiation fees, assessments, donations and lectures...will be appropriated to the rent or purchase of a suitable fire proof building for the safe keeping of the archives.”<sup>23</sup>

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Maury’s admonition to white Southerners that they must rely on themselves to piece together their own records and history of the Civil War era struck home. One of the first to heed the call was the obscure P. W. Alexander of Thomaston, Georgia, who five months after Appomattox had announced his intention to collect “military and naval reports, orders and maps, plans of campaigns, battles and sieges, private letters from the army, congressional documents, and messages of the President and Governors of Southern States” from anyone who had copies. Alexander had not shared how or where he would store his accessions; presumably he expected that what came in could easily fit in a bookcase.<sup>24</sup>

County courthouses also might be suitable repositories for newly-gathered information. After all, it had long been a southern social custom to meet and greet at the courts when other venues were unavailable. Additionally, the highly local aspects of recruiting Civil War units meant that Confederate soldiers usually went off to war alongside their friends and neighbors from the courthouses. Therefore, it had made perfect sense to “Soldier,” a Sumter County veteran trying to assemble and record the names of all the county’s Confederate veterans, to turn his personal mission into a community project appended to a party. “Let us hear from the

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<sup>23</sup>“Southern Historical Society,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 25, 1869. On the SHS see Starnes, “Forever Faithful”; Gallagher, “Shaping Public Memory of the Civil War.”

<sup>24</sup>“A Card,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 22, 1865; *Alabama Beacon*, December 15, 1865.

people,” “Soldier” proclaimed, “concert measures for a public meeting sometime in the next Spring...have a rousing barbecue, and assemble all the old soldiers, their wives, widows and children at the county seat, where we can shake hands, eat the fatted calf, talk over the past and organize in permanent form for systematic work.”<sup>25</sup>

Southern state officials wanted to gather this same information, because they considered it properly their bailiwick. Almost all Confederate regiments, after all, had been state units, mustered-in, officered, and equipped by state governments. Twenty years after Lee’s surrender, Alabama’s Adjutant General J. N. Gilmer reminded Montgomery’s citizens that he was the “proper custodian” not only of old regimental battle flags but also the muster rolls for every military company (units of 75-100 men at full strength) that Alabama had raised for the war. Gilmer did not state whether communities should surrender their original rolls or provide copies, but he implied that in either case Alabamians could recreate the information easily. “Many of the original rolls are held by the officers,” Gilmer had helpfully noted, and “some officers are able to make out their rolls from memory” by calling aloud the names of their men. Other states, including Georgia and South Carolina, belatedly made unsuccessful attempts to recreate Confederate troop rolls by interviewing veterans and copying county registers.<sup>26</sup>

Often ex-Confederate archival builders thought the best policy was to persuade the press to reprint wartime information, thereby making it immediately available while simultaneously producing multiple copies. A veteran of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment working for the

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<sup>25</sup>Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), chapter 5; *Livingston Journal*, January 4, 1878.

<sup>26</sup>“Old Muster Rolls, Which Adjutant General Gilmer Desires,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 21, 1885; Theodore H. Jack, “The Preservation of Georgia History,” *North Carolina Review* (July 1927), 239-251; Salley, Jr., “Preservation of South Carolina History.”

*Marion Commonwealth* sought help from his comrades in assembling a history of the unit, to include the usual “facts and figures” but also “‘hair-breadth escapes’...suffering on the march, or some act of daring worthy to be embalmed in the pages of history.” Ideally, the *Commonwealth* would serialize the history, so veterans of the 4<sup>th</sup> and their kin ought to get subscriptions. A prep school in Green Springs, Alabama, collected a roll of all students who had died fighting for the Confederacy, then ran the list in the *Montgomery Advertiser* where relatives could fact-check it and other local newspapers could pick it up. Of 52 names on the list, all but 4 already had known dates and locations of death.<sup>27</sup>

Preserving such information in newspaper reprints and mass copies followed a long-standing American archival practice. It had the added advantage of being cheap. Creating organized archival repositories proved far more difficult over the post-bellum period. Late nineteenth-century white Southerners who believed that old records ought to be preserved in perpetuity at the public expense faced several challenges.

The first was a lack of money. Large public spending had never been a priority in the antebellum South. Then besides the immense fiscal damages inflicted during the war (most notably the billions lost to emancipation of enslaved peoples) there had been additional money lost by Reconstruction-era governments’ peculations, even if the actual amounts embezzled fell short of what white supremacist “Redeemers” claimed they had been. Having restored white southern home rule on the public basis of responsible spending, the Redeemer governments were committed to austerity. Archival funding would not be an easy sell, even when the records to be

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<sup>27</sup>“History of the ‘Fourth Alabama’,” *Selma Weekly Messenger*, November 17, 1866; “Resolutions in Memoriam, and Roll of Honor of the Hermathenian Society of Green Springs School, Alabama,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 9, 1867.

saved were precious to white Southerners, as particularly with wartime records. Nor could popular, pro-Confederate organizations like the SHS avoid the difficulties. In 1882, after a failed benefit to raise \$50,000 for an archives building in New Orleans, the society's mouthpieces had warned that its "carefully collected" documents were at risk of being "scattered."<sup>28</sup>

A second challenge to southern archival mobilization was the sense that the authorities spent enough maintaining old records as it was. In Alabama, Reconstruction-era Secretary of State Jabez Parker had provoked an icy, contradictory editorial when he claimed to have processed all the state's papers on the cheap. The Republican Parker, the editor announced, had not worked wonders with a mere \$200 budget, and he was lying when he said that his predecessors had regularly spent twelve times that amount maintaining government records. In truth, the "carpetbaggers" in the legislature had allocated \$2,400 many years before to excavate extra basement space in the capitol and to establish a state library, a new Supreme Court chamber, and shelves and accoutrements for offices. Parker's sum was only the tail end of the project. This was an important point, the editor had concluded, because Parker's false economy, "calculated to deceive," implied that the state's archives required regular funding; in fact, they did not, and there ought to be no further allocations for them.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, as historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage has pointed out, at the back of white Southerners' minds were the racial complications of building archives. Over the *long duree* of elite white hegemony, it had been unnecessary to save most records because they would have disclosed little that the adamant southern social order of planters on top, non-planters towards

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<sup>28</sup> *North Alabamian*, April 28, 1882; *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 2, 1882; Hamer, "Records of Southern History"; De Roulhac, "Three Centuries of Southern Records."

<sup>29</sup> "Secretary Parker – State Archives," *Alabama State Journal*, September 13, 1872.

the bottom, and enslaved and free African-Americans in the dirt had not already made perfectly clear. During the brief period that Confederate defeat, Union military occupation, and federally-directed emancipation and Reconstruction turned everything topsy-turvy, an archival movement would have been inadvisable for white Southerners, given that the recently-liberated and the Republican opposition would have used it to their own ends. The supposed overthrow of Reconstruction in 1876-1877 was to white southern minds only a tentative success, and their nightmares about the Yankees' return lingered until the defeat of Henry Lodge's 1890 Force Bill, which had it passed would have brought back federal oversight of voting and civil rights issues in the South. As before, white Southerners hesitated to create central archival repositories, fearing Force Bill supporters might use them to store documents containing unfavorable material. If some things needed to be saved, there were plenty of amateur historians with libraries and studies. Otherwise the old, dank garrets of courthouses and capitols would suffice.<sup>30</sup>

There were also plenty of informal archival collectives dutifully saving artifacts and documents favorable to the "Lost Cause." Besides the SHS, in which clustered the highest-ranking ex-Confederates, there were several veterans organizations. The largest by far was the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), formed in 1889 to give the "web-foot" private soldier a community of his own. In the veterans' sundown years, their male descendants kept the fathers' memories alive through the United Sons of Confederate Veterans (USCV, later simply the SCV). For white southern women who had grown up during the war, hundreds of local Ladies

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<sup>30</sup> Brundage, *The Southern Past*. See also K. Stephen Prince, "Jim Crow Memory: Southern White Supremacists and the Regional Politics of Remembrance," in Carole Emberton & Bruce E. Baker, eds., *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's most turbulent Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 17-34.

Memorial Associations (LMAs) appeared in the first few years after Appomattox with the mission to locate, repatriate, inter, and memorialize all Confederate dead in separate, marked southern cemeteries. As grass grew up over Confederate graves, LMA ceremonies subtly but steadily inverted their proportions of weeping to defiance, so that before the end of Reconstruction the ladies had already defeated Federal occupation officials in a cold war of words and wills. Once the last occupation troops had left, younger women had gravitated to chapters of the new United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). The Daughters' mission had been to secure the ground won. Battlefield and courthouse statuary, pro-Confederate and pro-southern museum exhibits, and "correct" textbook histories of slavery, the war, and Reconstruction were their triumphal markers.<sup>31</sup>

Each of these heritage organizations collected records after a fashion. The SHS had its *Papers*, which mixed first-hand accounts from the war years with defensive reminiscences and political commentary. The LMAs had lists of the honored dead, augmented where possible with soldiers' service information. UCV, SCV, and UDC members gathered letters, diaries, newspaper clippings, speeches, memoirs, reminiscences, and scattered ephemera in chapter scrapbooks. They made select documents publicly available in the pages of *The Confederate Veteran*, a monthly periodical for the SCV, and in various regular and limited-run publications of the UDC. The topics encompassed in these documents roughly corresponded to the organizations collecting them. Whereas the Veterans and their Sons gathered records of battles,

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<sup>31</sup>Fred Arthur Bailey, "The Textbooks of the 'Lost Cause': Censorship and the Creation of Southern Histories," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75 (Fall 1991): 507-533; Blair, *Cities of the Dead*; Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past*; Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*; John A. Simpson, *S. A. Cunningham & The Confederate Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); W. Stuart Towns, *Enduring Legacy: Rhetoric and Ritual of the Lost Cause* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012).

leaders, and casualties, the Daughters collected these plus stories from the Confederate home front featuring loyal slaves, ersatz and wartime household economies, religious matters, and wartime romances.<sup>32</sup>

To most white southerners in the post-bellum period, grassroots record-collecting supplemented by periodical publications seemed to have been sufficient. Through their own efforts they had averted the awful threat of losing their recent history. The SHS held the original battle reports of the Confederate Army. The Veterans, Sons, and Daughters had gathered masses of personal material on former Confederate soldiers and Confederate women. Cases of martial relics testifying to southern defiance were safely deposited at the Confederate Memorial Library & Museum in Richmond, Virginia, for everyone to see. Thousands of other “lost” records were actually safely packed away in private homes and public buildings, waiting to be turned over to proper custodians. White southerners seeking wartime primary sources could find them reproduced in a round number of books. For Alabamians, there was Joseph Hodgson’s *Cradle of the Confederacy* (1876) and William Russell Smith’s *History and Debates of the [Secession] Convention of the People of Alabama* (1861), while *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men* (1872) by Willis Brewer, Perry & Smith’s *Directory of the City of Montgomery, and Historical Sketches of Alabama Soldiers* (1866), and the twelve volumes of *Confederate Military History* (1899) had provided basic summaries of Confederate military information.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*; Foster, *Ghosts*; Janney, *Burying the Dead*; Starnes, “Forever Faithful”; Simpson, *Cunningham*.

<sup>33</sup>Reiko Hillyer, “Relics of Reconciliation: The Confederate Museum and Civil War Memory in the New South,” *Public Historian* 33 (November 2011): 35-62; Galloway, “Archives, Power, and History.”

What was better, the late enemy had suddenly become more cooperative by the 1880s. Weary of sectional squabbling, ashamed of some of their wartime plunder, and remorseful about “misguided” efforts to reconstruct southern society, many white Northerners became archival partners. Union Army veterans had begun turning over captured information to southern state governments and newspapers. The *Montgomery Advertiser* reported in 1886 that a former federal captain who had somehow acquired a muster roll for Company D of the 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment had sent the roll to the *Jacksonville Republican*, which would forward it to the capitol for safe-keeping. To cover any unforeseen difficulties, *Our Mountain Home*, a Talladega newspaper, had already reproduced the roll’s 72 names. Besides such individuals, northern institutions with thorough record-keeping practices shifted to helping rather than hindering their southern counterparts. The Wisconsin Historical Society shipped a number of captured Confederate documents back to the Alabama capitol, while the elite New England Historic-Genealogical Society offered the Alabama Historical Society useful tips on organization and fund-raising.<sup>34</sup>

Undoubtedly the best example of an archival olive branch between North and South was the joint project that had produced the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. A few months after the war ended, War Department officials had decided that, for the sake of history and in testimony to Union victory, all reports from both sides outlining the course of military operations should be bound and published. There had been a dearth of such information in the Confederate archives, however, due mostly to the wartime disintegration of Confederate record gathering. Former Confederate General Marcus J. Wright, hired to flesh out the Confederate half

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<sup>34</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, April 10, 1886; *Our Mountain Home*, April 7, 1886; Edmund Hafter to John Snow, April 5, 1877, Box 36, Alabama Historical Society - Correspondence, Thomas M. Owen Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as ADAH).

of the *OR*, as it is colloquially known, understood that whereas Union Army reports had gone straight to Washington, on “the Confederate side, where communication with headquarters...was often cut off, and where armies and commands were separated, many...reports, and orders, and records were retained by the...officers.” Wright and the War Department had to reach out to surviving Confederates, particularly the intractable SHS, to acquire the missing papers. Being a brother veteran of the late “Cause,” Wright smoothed ruffled feathers and secured cooperation and documents from the SHS. Another factor in the *OR*’s success was the comity and transparency of Union veteran and project editor Robert N. Scott. Scott and the War Department’s quid pro quo, whereby numerous ex-Confederates got access to the captured archives in exchange for further filling them out, eased the long-rankling tensions stemming from federal custody of Confederate papers. The *OR*’s strictly-military focus also helped the partnership by sidestepping the thorny constitutional, cultural, and slavery-related aspects of the war that had usually incited North-South arguments. Once the 128 books of the *OR* had begun rolling off government presses in 1881, Union and Confederate veterans could see what the other side had seen and discover that, so far as the war was concerned, they were more alike than not.<sup>35</sup>

Yet despite all this, by the late nineteenth century southern record collecting was running out of steam. The principal producers and collectors---white men and women who had experienced the war---were reaching the ends of their lives. These aged and infirm former Confederates craved nothing so much as pensions, yet few of the collected papers showed their backgrounds or proved their service. Where useful information was available, it was widely

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<sup>35</sup>“Federal and Confederate,” *Selma Dollar Times*, July 24, 1878; “The Washington Records,” *Selma Times*, November 12, 1878; Sternhell, “Afterlives of a Confederate Archive”; Dallas D. Irvine, “The Genesis of the Official Records,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 24 (September 1937): 221-229; Harold E. Mahan, “The Arsenal of History: The *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*,” *Civil War History* 29 (March 1983): 5-27.

scattered amongst several collecting organizations and therefore difficult to retrieve. Nor was southern society as committed to the program as it had once been. Veterans and memorial organizations began to bemoan white southern youths' seeming indifference towards the late Confederacy and southern leaders' obsessions with economic growth and social progress. As recent studies of Civil War memory have argued, the era's rollicking reconciliations between white Southerners and white Northerners depended on participants and medium; neither side forgot or forgave effortlessly or completely. Nevertheless, the Confederation generation had been an archives-building generation. If it went to its collective grave leaving no one else to take up the reins, then one day the records might be gone too.<sup>36</sup>

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As it happened, southern state governments became interested in systematic records collection and preservation at the same time. The reasons were demographic and economic. The post-bellum South's population was slowly but steadily increasing and in some locations was living better than before. More people to govern meant that it was important to know enough about them to govern them well. Hence, southern state officials needed to start gathering and analyzing vast amounts of information quickly and effectively. This need paired nicely with a new, national ideal of efficient, involved government that was partly an import of post-Reconstruction carpetbaggers, and certainly a departure from traditional southern practices. So too was the moderate prosperity of the "New South"---made possible by heavy Northern investment---which white Southerners on the make wanted to sustain. Southern growth and the

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<sup>36</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Blair, *Cities of the Dead*; Foster, *Ghosts*; Janney, *Burying the Dead*, and *Remembering the Civil War*.

increasing complexities of intra-state management spelled the end of the Redeemers and their laissez-faire, cheese-paring approach to governance. It was now the turn of the Progressives, with their gospel of humankind's boundless capacity for improvement and their doctrine of leaders' duty to improve the safety and well-being of the electorate. Carrying out the Progressive program however required the most modern archives systems, well-arranged, well-maintained, and well-protected in physical repositories. They were the means to fair taxes, good schools---and full, prompt Confederate pensions.<sup>37</sup>

It is all too easy to make the southern Progressive movement into something it never was. Present-day scholars of southern history are rightly skeptical of how much the South changed during this period, or if it changed at all. Beyond a few gleaming cities, a touch more industry, and a pinch more government spending, there was little deep transformation. The taproots of what constituted essential "southernness," as author W. J. Cash later identified them at the height of the Great Depression, remained in place. Centuries of white southern thought patterns, trending conservative in economics and reactionary, xenophobic, and vindictive in social matters, could not altered in a generation, nor were they. Even in Alabama, often considered the most progressive of the Progressive-era southern states, the story was business as usual. Already "solid" on what Glenn Feldman considers the critical issues---business' right to rule and white communities' right to crush all dissent, especially from African-Americans---Progressives in Alabama "tolerated, indeed sometimes facilitated, [merely] cosmetic changes" in the body

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<sup>37</sup>Brundage, *Southern Past*; Finch, "Preserver"; Foster, *Ghosts*; Simpson, "Origin of State Departments of Archives and History."

politic. Often the only substantive difference between that time and the ones preceding was “a mania for organization, efficiency, standardization, professionalization, and functionality.”<sup>38</sup>

Still, this mania made proper archives more desirable to southern state officials than had historically been the case. A state administration that appeared to collect and employ records professionally was obviously doing its job and should be re-elected. Therefore, if Progressive southern governments really preferred the status quo, then it behooved them to build archives. Moreover, and because the burden of the past permeated all southern culture, those who ran the states would do well to partner with historical societies, gentlemen scholars, and educators, who knew how to identify, acquire, and maintain important documents. Each side offered something worthwhile: on the part of the governments, public money, on the part of the collectors, expertise. More records could thereby be kept, and more data known and used. State-sponsored archives tantalized proponents with the marriage of innovation to tradition. All that was lacking to get the program off the ground were connectors---those with a penchant for organization, a passion for saving papers, and political instincts and acumen. Thomas Owen was one of few who fit the bill.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday Publishing, 1941); Glenn Feldman, *The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 46; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, and Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018). For the principal works on post-Civil War change versus continuity in the South, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 1992); James C. Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999); and C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). Benedict Anderson discusses the mania for archives in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

<sup>39</sup>Brundage, *Southern Past*; Kane, “Manuscript Collecting”; Simpson, “Origin of State Departments of Archives and History.”

## 2. The Archival Builder of Alabama

Born to physician William Owen and Nancy McAdory Owen on December 15, 1866, Thomas McAdory Owen grew up near Bessemer, Jefferson County. His father served in the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment during the war. Owen attended the University of Alabama for his bachelor's and later a law degree and spent his spare time in the period's standard oratorical societies. Historical study does not seem to have been a priority for Owen as an undergraduate---despite being the son of a Confederate veteran---because he did not take any history courses until his senior year. He already had a mind prone to collection and categorization, however. While working on his law degree, Owen thought about making legal history readily accessible by assembling the proceedings for Alabama's most important court cases into five reference volumes. When Owen asked Judge Henderson Somerville for an estimate of how much time this might require, Somerville gently reminded his student that he had other, more immediate priorities, so Owen shelved the project.<sup>1</sup>

After graduating in 1887, Owen hung out his shingle in Bessemer and plunged into a lifelong involvement in politics. He served as justice of the peace in 1888, and, according to at least one friend, would have handily won a seat in the state legislature had he ever run for office. Owen also chaired the Jefferson County Democrats and was by 1892 the county's assistant solicitor general. Owen's political activities introduced him to the state's kingmakers, forming a

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<sup>1</sup>Monroe, "Founding," and "Thomas M. Owen," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, June 25, 2007, accessed December 8, 2019, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1189>; Milo B. Howard, Jr., "Thomas McAdory Owen: The Making of an Historian," Box 6, The Thirteen, Owen Papers, ADAH. According to the *Tuscaloosa Weekly Times*, May 12, 1899, Owen commanded a company of the university's student guard during his senior year.

network of relationships that he would harness to advantage once he discovered his archival calling.<sup>2</sup>

Few of these contacts would be as significant for Owen as the Bankhead family. Patriarch John Hollis Bankhead, a Confederate veteran of the 16<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment, had already served four terms as a state representative, one as a senator, and was in the middle of a twenty-year stretch representing Alabama's Sixth Congressional District when Owen first met him. Bankhead rubbed shoulders with many important people in Alabama. Because he served on the House committees of Rivers and Harbors, and Buildings and Grounds, he knew many important people in Washington, too.<sup>3</sup>

Given his influence, Bankhead was the sort of man with whom Owen would want to curry favor. More personally, Bankhead's daughter Marie had already caught Owen's eye at his graduation ceremonies from the University of Alabama. Polished and graceful, twenty-four-year-old Marie embodied the ideal persona of the white, southern post-Reconstruction female elite. On the one hand she was creative and outspoken within socially-acceptable limits, penning romantic plays set in Alabama's French colonial past and regularly editing the *Montgomery Advertiser's* society column. Marie even entertained the idea of writing a history of Alabama women, which according to a never-published newspaper copy would have included "a full discussion of the History of [Alabama women's] Legal Status," although it would mainly showcase "[their] refining and purifying influences that save men from savagery." On the other

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid; Mary A. Finch, "Thomas McAdory Owen: Preserver of Alabama History" (M.A. Thesis, Auburn University, 1991), 7-8; "Open Underwood Headquarters," *Our Mountain Home*, February 21, 1912.

<sup>3</sup>Angela Jill Cooley, "John Hollis Bankhead," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, March 27, 2008, accessed December 8, 2019, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1495>. Two of Bankhead's sons, John, Jr. and William, would later emulate their father's congressional arc.

hand, Marie evinced little interest in overturning the southern patriarchal status quo, later joining the Women's Anti-Ratification League to oppose the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. Despite Bankhead's reservations about his son-in-law's prospects, Marie and Thomas Owen married in April, 1893.<sup>4</sup>

By then Owen was developing an interest in the past. Milo Howard, the fourth director of the ADAH, has posited that Owen's historical awakening began when he attended a University of Alabama alumni address entitled "Ingersollism and Better Brains," in June, 1889. The subject of this address, given by former Confederate congressman William Russell Smith, was the dangerous philosophy of abolitionist free-thinker and staunch Republican Robert G. Ingersoll. Among other sacred cows, Ingersoll had dared to criticize antebellum southern society, and an excerpt of one of his critical speeches, "The Past Rises Before Me Like A Dream," had been installed at the former Robert E. Lee mansion at Arlington, Virginia.<sup>5</sup>

Sometime after hearing the "Ingersollism" address, Owen began collecting printed materials. At first this may have been less evidence of an archival bent than of a Victorian middle-class urge to acquire and hoard. Owen secured catalogs, Greek society programs, and other publications from his Alma matter. From university writings, he moved on to books on Alabama topics, again mainly to build up his personal library. Owen soon realized that there was little for him to collect, little having been written. He tried to solve the problem himself in March, 1891 by writing to several publishing companies proposing an Alabama history of "8 Vol[s] and 1000 pages." A blurb in a Huntsville newspaper claimed that the first half of the

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Lapczynski Hébert, "Marie Bankhead Owen," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, June 25, 2007, accessed December 8, 2019, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1188>; Unpublished material, Personal and Business Correspondence Letter book, Box 1, Letters, 1894-1896, Owen Papers, ADAH; "Compliments To Our Society Editor," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 13, 1908.

<sup>5</sup>Howard, Jr., "Making of an Historian," Owen Papers, ADAH. Owen told a reporter for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 11, 1897, that his interest in Alabama history began in 1891.

study would examine successive historical epochs, while the second half would treat special topics. To keep the history “free from the bias which a single mind might give it,” Owen wanted scholars such as John Witherspoon DuBose and University of Alabama Professor Benjamin F. Meek to write the chapters, which he would then assemble and edit. It was the sort of ambitious proposal a young man with negligible experience in writing or publishing would make, and perhaps not surprisingly none of the companies Owen contacted expressed any interest in it. Setting aside his multi-volume state history---for the time being---Owen went back to collecting, now trying to get bound volumes of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century newspapers.<sup>6</sup>

A pair of letters Owen wrote in the spring of 1892 reveals that he was suddenly reading and thinking about history with the zeal of a new convert. Owen was confident that he understood the discipline well and found faults with others’ commitment to it. To fellow lawyer George Hamner, Owen lamented Alabamians’ collective failure to be more studious and engaged:

I heartily agree with you...that such people are not now in a condition, financially or socially, to appreciate or care for the character of [our] work...There is, alas, too little enthusiasm manifested in every branch of intellectual research. Why, oh, why is it, that we have no more great libraries, no more learned societies, no more literary papers and magazines, and no more native authors, than we now have...[Yet] I feel that a change is

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 6; *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, July 29, 1891.

sure to come soon, and that we shall have such impulsive  
enthusiasm in this as our people always display in other things...<sup>7</sup>

Owen also tried his hand at historical writing, producing a short but critically-received historical sketch of Alabama for a newspaper.<sup>8</sup> “I have no doubt,” Owen grudgingly admitted to Hamner, “that there are those who, having different notions of what an analysis is or should be, or having adopted one purely arbitrary, will take issue with me.” The tone was pro forma, for evidently Owen felt that his critics *had* been purely arbitrary. What Owen wanted to know, and what he wanted his readers to ask themselves, was, “Are there stages in the growth of our State, if so how distinctive are they, and what were the determinate or influencing causes[?]”<sup>9</sup>

Owen soon wrote to Professor William S. Wyman at the University of Alabama, taking a von Ranke-esque position. “Above all I want to get at the truth of all that makes up the life of the people of a State,” he insisted, for “In no other way do I conceive can the work of the historian be valuable.” Any historical study worth its salt had to be both scrupulously accurate and topically exhaustive, otherwise “no one will care to consult it a second time; and if it contain one class of topics excluding other[s], it can but be regarded with distrust by all.”

From these basic requirements, Owen had a few critical appraisals of his own on the contributions of earlier and contemporary Alabama historians:

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<sup>7</sup> Owen to George W. Hamner, Washington, March 3, 1892, Box 1, Letters, 1890-1919, Owen Papers, ADAH.

<sup>8</sup>“Alabama History,” *Birmingham Age-Herald*, February 28, 1892.

<sup>9</sup>Owen to Hamner, March 3, 1892, Owen Papers, ADAH.

...how much do they contain of the truth; what particular topics...demand other, further and fuller examination; and what particular topics to regard as settled so far as to accuracy etc. and therefore precluding the necessity of examination of original sources...To particularize, do [Albert James] Pickett...[or Benjamin F] Meek...contain a true and accurate state of the events in the life of the country; if not, what of truth is there in them, and if I doubt them or any part of their statements to whom am I to appeal?...<sup>10</sup>

Owen's remarks on re-examining original sources suggest that he had started to look at historians' citations as well as their arguments. From there it was a short distance to thinking about where sources cited came from and how well they were being preserved. Books were the easiest sources to obtain. Due to his legal career Owen had already started snatching these up. Unprinted sources were quite another matter. While working for the 1892 Democratic convention in Alabama, Owen learned that the state government kept many old manuscript records. That same summer he went to Montgomery to investigate the state's holdings, probably to narrow down a topic for an upcoming presentation to the Alabama Historical Society.<sup>11</sup>

Owen was dismayed by what he found in the capital. "The papers belonging to the state are in a miserable condition," he told George Hamner. "Part are in the Secretary of State's Office, some are in the other departments, and some are in the Supreme Court Library, while the

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<sup>10</sup>Owen to W. S. Wyman, March 9, 1892, Letters, Owen Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Monroe, "Founding"; Howard, Jr., "Making of an Historian"; Owen to Wyman, May 13, 1892, Letters, Owen Papers, ADAH.

greater part of the early manuscripts...are in an old Cellar, moulding [sic] away and perishing utterly.” Among the documents kept so indifferently were copies of successive Alabama constitutions and the journals of the House and Senate dating back to 1818.<sup>12</sup> Likely, Owen did not know then that the condition and treatment of Alabama’s records was no different, and probably no worse, than in any other southern state. The sad state of the sources he was hoping to use apparently forced him to scrap his presentation; it was the first of several wake-up calls.

Whether this specific research trip encouraged Owen to begin collecting unprinted sources, or whether it was an outgrowth of his collector’s impulse, Owen started gathering manuscript material no later than 1893. Notably, his first work focused on Civil War-era records. Owen decided to get information about his father’s Confederate regiment, the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama. To that end he wrote to Adjutant General W. S. Ford asking for copies of the regiment’s muster rolls. The following February he wrote to at least seven of William Owen’s comrades. For the most part Owen sought additional contacts and bits of data he could tabulate on his own. From Major C. S. Henagan, Owen wanted a wartime photograph, the names and post-office boxes of any living members of Henagan’s company, and the names of any soldiers in the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment who were known to have kept diaries or journals. From Captain J. W. A. Wright, Owen sought a brief sketch of Wright’s company, addresses of survivors, and the diary Wright was supposed to have kept during the war. From Price Williams, Owen asked for any information on his company commander. With a few other veterans of the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama, Owen went deeper. He wanted G. S. Smith, son of the regiment’s colonel, to tell him if the late Smith had left any papers “of a historical or curious nature,” and he asked Captain

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<sup>12</sup>Owen to Hamner, June 16, 1892, Owen Papers. Earlier there had been an appropriations bill for \$25,000 to enlarge the capitol because “[a]rchives had been accumulating for thirty-five years...in a dirty cellar, there to rot and crumble for want of room,” “Capitol Enlargement,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 10, 1885.

A. J. Derby for any outstanding memories of “community sentiment,” “flag presentation,” or “[joining] the Regt.”<sup>13</sup>

Assessing books such as DuBose’s biography of secessionist firebrand William Lowndes Yancey, writing brief historical sketches, and researching his father’s military service were more than hobbies for Owen. Soon he was soon spending more time on intellectual pursuits than his main line of work, and his legal practice suffered. Luckily for Owen, he had family and friends who could help. Owen’s associate George Hamner was in the United States Post Office Department in Washington, D.C., and it was probably from Hamner that Owen learned of an opening for a chief clerk in the department’s Division of Inspectors and Mail Depredations. Owen must have asked his father-in-law John Bankhead to help him obtain the position, which he got in the late summer of 1894. An added bonus of the job was that when Owen’s working days had ended, he could walk over to the Library of Congress and peruse its vast stores of printed and manuscript materials.<sup>14</sup>

Not only were there old records in the nation’s capital, there were historians busy combing through them. When Owen arrived in Washington, the American historical profession---only recently professionalized by advanced degree programs---was a little over a decade into a revolution in teaching, researching, and writing. Professors such as Hebert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins University and William Dunning at Columbia University were training graduate students in the seminar method, inspired by earlier reforms in the German education system engineered by Leopold von Ranke. Instead of learning and reciting the conclusions of

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<sup>13</sup>W. S. Ford to Owen, August 29, 1893, Owen to Ford, September 7, 1893, Owen Papers; History Copying Book No. 2 (page numbers unavailable), Box 2, Business and Personal Letters, Owen Papers, ADAH.

<sup>14</sup>Owen to Hamner, March 3, 1892, Owen Papers; *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 11, 1897; Monroe, “Founding,” 23-24.

older scholars by rote, seminar students of history had to do their own work. They looked for original sources from the past, assembled the facts these sources revealed into a logical, coherent narrative, and via the narrative explained the establishment and development of contemporary social and political institutions. Students' historical narratives became research papers, presented in the seminar to professors and colleagues for constructive criticism and transparency in work.<sup>15</sup> While von Ranke's oft-quoted intent to reconstruct the past "as it actually was" is now understood as an impressionistic expression of desire, late nineteenth-century American scholars believed that the seminar method produced absolute, uncorrupted, literal truth. Seminar-based scientific history was supposedly free of personal likes and dislikes, cultural dogmas, political spin, shifting public mood, or the local, popular mythologies beloved by chambers of commerce. Research in institutional origins and developments contributed to all this fairness and balance by emphasizing incremental changes in unspectacular---even drab and boring---subjects. Original sources and peer review would further ensure complete objectivity.<sup>16</sup>

Making scientific history the norm required new partnerships amongst academics and institutions. Already there was the American Historical Association (AHA), founded in 1884 as a collaborative social club where amateurs dabbling in history mixed with the first crop of professionals. At the AHA's annual meetings, members gathered to read research papers, discuss recent works on historical topics, solicit each other's help for forthcoming projects, and badger libraries, historical societies, college boards, and federal and state governments for

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<sup>15</sup>The *Birmingham News* explained the seminar method at Auburn University this way: "Each student is assigned a subject to be worked up and to be prepared in a specific time, being provided with a bibliography on each subdivision of the outline which accompanies the subject assigned. Then the doors of the library are flung open for research. This part of the work is in the nature of a drill practice which purposes to fascinate the students and endear them to labors in the field of permanent research. At the expiration of the time allotted each, the student is required to deliver orally the results of his study before the whole class and to answer all questions asked by other members pertaining to subject in hand," "Developing Historic Work In The State of Alabama," November 25, 1902.

<sup>16</sup>Novick, *That Noble Dream*.

documents, money, and jobs. During Herbert Adams' tenure as director, the organization's membership became majority professional, and slowly younger, accredited scholars wrested control from older, antiquarian-focused members. Adams' vision was that through participation in the AHA, professional American historians could quickly fill research gaps, discover untapped resource caches, and, quite naturally, convince all colleges and universities to adopt the seminar method. Adams also believed that in time the AHA would help smooth over regional variations in the teaching of history, or at least create reasonable facsimiles of Ivy League standards.<sup>17</sup>

Adams especially wanted to transform the South this way. There, the practice of history scarcely measured up to Adams' vision, with few institutions of higher education (the new Johns Hopkins the notable exception), and with little funding or support provided by the states. History as popularly practiced in the South was, in the eyes of Adams and the professionals, also partisan, parochial, and romanticist, and so encrusted with heredity and eccentricity as to be little better than fairy-tale telling. They pointed to southern poverty, the legacy of military defeat and occupation, and the influence of Confederate heritage groups as the main reasons why the South was so far behind. Adams was confident that none of these complications was permanent. In time New South states flush with money would build up universities and hire seminar-trained historians. Southerners' predominant memories would be of national reunion, peace, and benevolent Yankee oversight. To speed up the transformation, Adams made the South his priority by establishing southern history as a special category for members' papers, starting with

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

the 1889 national meeting, and by including at least one article on a southern historical topic in every issue of the AHA's journal, *The American Historical Review*.<sup>18</sup>

A number of southern-born scholars shared Adams' main goals, even if they privately believed that southern homespun historical practices were just as worthwhile as the seminar method. Southern academic leaders of the New South, including quite a few former Confederates, were generally willing to emulate some northern educational programs. Presidents and professors at southern colleges and universities wanted their students to learn the sciences and scientific history, so that southern industry could blossom and the southern past could have capable defenders with modern training. Quite a few white southern graduates of Columbia and Johns Hopkins joined the AHA. Others borrowed a page from Adams and formed the Southern History Association (now the Southern *Historical* Association or SHA) in 1896. Almost identical to the older organization in its basic activities and practices, the early SHA nevertheless differed from the AHA in several ways. First, there was little chance that the SHA would become majority-professional anytime soon because there were simply too few members with advanced degrees. The early SHA also set loose membership requirements specifically to recruit southern gentlemen scholars. Unlike Adams, who would have weeded all of the dabblers out of the AHA if he could, the founding members of the SHA wanted their organization to remain welcoming to buffs and hobbyists. The organization's welcome-one-and-all membership policy, as Bethany Leigh Johnson has argued, was for some a calculated ploy to entice amateur

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<sup>18</sup>David D. Van Tassel, "The American Historical Association and the South, 1884-1913," *Journal of Southern History* vol. 23 (November 1957): 465-482; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *The South Lives in History: Southern Historians and their Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), chapter 1.

historians into adopting the professional approach unconsciously. For other members, amateurs needed to be a part of the SHA because their approach to history was passionate and popular.<sup>19</sup>

The amateur Owen found the SHA appealing, becoming one of the first to join it. Through the organization, Owen formed deep relationships with professional southern historians such as Colyer Meriwether and Baxter protégé Stephen B. Week. Learning the “correct” way to practice history, Owen seems to have also learned that dedicated, purposeful record collection was the capstone that held everything together. Scientific history papers depended on original sources, and original sources had to be found, saved, stored, and made accessible. Individuals, groups, and organizations could help, but neither separately nor together could they do it all. For an inveterate collector like Owen, the limitations of separate, grassroots archives programs became all too clear.<sup>20</sup>

Owen’s historical awakening in Washington brought back to mind the documents he had seen “moulding away” and “perishing utterly” in the Montgomery capitol cellar. If Alabama’s government had a Progressive duty to take better care of such things, it first needed to know the full magnitude of the problem. The solution, Owen thought, was to have a state commission locate every group of papers in Alabama, assess their physical condition, and suggest how to preserve them. Owen tapped his contacts in the legislature to propose a bill in 1894 establishing the commission. Strangely for someone already deep in politics, Owen did not build support for the bill. Either Owen was too busy to write the necessary letters (an unlikely explanation considering how many he would write in just a few years), or else he assumed that every

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<sup>19</sup>Dan R. Frost, *Thinking Confederates: Academia and the Idea of Progress in the New South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000); Johnson, “Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past.”

<sup>20</sup>Finch, “Preserver”; Mattie U. Russell, “The Influence of Historians on the Archival Profession in the United States,” *American Archivist* 46 (Summer, 1983): 277-285.

legislator would see the wisdom of his bill and vote for it.<sup>21</sup> Few did; moreover there had been a recent recession which left money tight. So, the bill went down to defeat. Thankfully for Owen, he learned an invaluable lesson from the failure: “a good idea is not enough. A stronger base of support was needed to successfully pass a bill in the legislature.”<sup>22</sup>

After a few years in Washington, Owen moved back to Alabama and resumed his law practice.<sup>23</sup> Yet having seen and embraced a larger world, Owen could never quite settle back into the routines of a small-town southern attorney. His collector’s impulse, plus his conversion to scientific history, kept bringing him back to the quest to save records. Something had to be done, and Owen was certain that he was the person to do it. He would practice law on the side as needed, but his avocation had become, and would remain, his guiding light and, eventually, his job.

Owen’s natural gregariousness now proved to be an immeasurable advantage in this endeavor. From his college days onward Owen was an extrovert, happiest in the company of other people. He was already an active alumnus with the University of Alabama, a politico, a weekend warrior in the Bessemer Rifles, and a member of the SHA. In succession he now became a member, then historian-general, commander of the Alabama division, and commander-in-chief of the USCV; a member of the American and Alabama Library associations; a member

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<sup>21</sup>In one of his annual reports to the archives’ board of trustees, Owen put his regular correspondence at 2,500 letters per annum, “Alabama Department of Archives and History Minutes and Annual Report, 1905,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, Record Group SG017912, ADAH.

<sup>22</sup>Monroe, “Founding,” 24-25. Some members of the AHA had been thinking along similar lines for Alabama before Owen had found the capitol records, “Running Comment of A Bystander,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 41, 1891. We know that Owen paid attention to another plea for archival preservation in the same newspaper, “Historical Alabama,” June 18, 1893, because he clipped it for his scrapbook.

<sup>23</sup>Owen did not disclose why he left Washington, although a letter written several years later by a Washingtonian intimates that he had lost his job at the Post Office, John O. Brownlow to Owen, April 19, 1901, Correspondence, A-W, Record Group SG016698, Administrative Files - Thomas M. Owen, 1901-1920 (hereafter cited as AF-TO), ADAH.

of the Alabama History Teachers Association; a member of the Sons of the American Revolution; a member of “The Thirteen,” a literary association headquartered in Montgomery representing the city’s economic and political leaders; a corresponding member of the AHA; and a participant in Alabama county and municipal clubs too numerous to count. An ever-widening circle of friends and acquaintances meant more prospective partners, funders, and confidantes to marshal in support of his archival ambitions.<sup>24</sup>

It was not enough for Owen to be an outgoing type with a wide spectrum of interests. When it came to history, he had to bring others into his orbit. Dissatisfied with what he judged a low level of historical engagement amongst Alabamians, Owen concentrated his efforts on stimulating greater public interest in the past. One way to do this was to join every historical organization represented in his state, which Owen had done by the end of his life. A different and perhaps better way was to build (or rebuild) a single, large organization focused on his state’s history. There was already one such organization, the Alabama Historical Society (AHS), but it was in a sad state.

Organized in 1850 by Albert James Pickett, author of the state’s first written history, the AHS had already experienced several ups and downs. Secession, war, and Confederate mobilization shut down the forty-six-member original association within its first decade. Slightly larger when reactivated in 1874, the society continued to struggle from the last days of Reconstruction into the twilight of the Redeemers. Members had prepared mini-biographies of the first Alabamians for a projected new state history by Willis Brewer, then cast aspersions on

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<sup>24</sup> Doster, “Owen”; “Thomas Owen and the Bessemer Rifles,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed February 29, 2020, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/m-2830>; “Tennessee Valley Historical Society,” *Guntersville Democrat*, September 11, 1902; “Alabama Book Lovers Will Meet To Form Association,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 3, 1904; Finch, “Preserver”; Monroe, “Founding”; Stephenson, “Pioneer Archivist.”

each other's character when one of them misplaced the manuscripts. Secretary John Snow had greater success gathering genealogical material on leading Tuscaloosa families than on getting anything organized for the presses. Opening addresses at the society's 1881 and 1882 general meetings had outlined no future policies, only regrets over sparse attendance and short funds "owing to the comparative youth and poverty of our State."<sup>25</sup>

At least the second incarnation of the AHS worked well with the press. Through the columns of the *Montgomery Advertiser* it had occasionally taken its message to the people, asking "citizens in all the counties...to contribute interesting facts," particularly "those acts of history which are now known only to old citizens." For only fifty cents, prospective members could subscribe to the society's journal, the *Alabama Historical Reporter*, containing "accounts of the workings of the Society, extracts from important documents, and valuable contributions upon things new and old." Internal reorganizations had also helped clarify the society's mission. Benjamin Meek's 1883 presidential address had boasted that "our system [of human research] covers every subject of the State, in the animals, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms," yet on the other hand cited that the most promising investigations had been in Native American archeology and the "dark and bloody period" of the 1860s. Three "bureaus of correspondence" covered the most important topics: Alabama's aboriginal and colonial European history, "the literature of America," and the shipping of Confederate muster rolls to the society's mailbox in Auburn. Regrettably, the AHS's post-bellum progress had been more apparent than real. "Enthusiasm,"

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<sup>25</sup>Mitchell B. Garrett, "The Preservation of Alabama History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 5 (January 1928): 4; *The Alabama Historical Society, Administrative Circular No. 4* (Montgomery: W. M. Rogers, 1899), 5-6; W. Moody to W. Brewer, July 14, 1873, Moody to Henry R. Rugeley, August 11 and September 14, 1875, Rugeley to Moody, September 2, 1875, Brewer to Rugeley, June 7, 1876 (all in Box 36, Alabama Historical Society – Correspondence, Owen Papers, ADAH); "Alabama Genealogies – Report of the Secretary, John Snow, July 3, 1876," *ibid.*; "To The President and Members of the Alabama Historical Society," n.d., *ibid.*; "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Alabama Historical Society, July 1881," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 21, 1881; *The Clarion*, June 27, 1882.

Owen later noted, “did not long continue”; membership had declined; and beyond an occasional meeting the society once more had gone dormant.<sup>26</sup>

Owen was either a member of the AHS or a regular guest at meetings before he took up his Washington post office job. Identifying its marginality for most Alabamians, he wondered if perhaps the society should move its headquarters from Tuscaloosa to a large city like Birmingham or Montgomery. Aware that historical societies in the northern states were humming along, Owen was embarrassed that his state’s consortium of historians was doing so poorly. To stir up enthusiasm, Owen told friends, the society should publish minutes of meetings and papers read, make lists of all the relics and papers it owned, and form a library---exactly what members had wanted and tried to do for years.<sup>27</sup> Once he returned to Alabama, Owen gave serious thought to how to revive the AHS. His solution was to blend politics, pragmatism, and the power of the pen (or the typewriter).

At the society’s first 1898 meeting, Owen introduced a resolution empowering the secretary to publicize or promote the AHS in any way he thought worthwhile. After getting the resolution passed, Owen got himself elected to the position. Secretary Owen then did something that he had failed to do when pushing for his historical commission bill: he wrote hundreds of letters. One brief Owen biography estimates that he wrote at least 1,500 letters within a year of becoming secretary. Nearly every letter was an invitation to join the AHS. While thankful for donations and loans to the organization, Owen mainly wanted new members. “All Alabamians,”

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<sup>26</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, June 27, 1882; “Alabama Historical Society – Sketch of its Organization and Progress by Dr. B. F. Meek, President,” *Selma Times*, December 7, 1883; “Alabama Historical Society,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 6 and June 23, 1885; “Alabama Historical Society,” *Tuskaloosa Gazette*, June 25, 1885; “The Alabama Historical Society,” *Greenville Advocate*, July 15, 1885; *Circular No. 4*, 6.

<sup>27</sup>Owen to W. S. Wyman, March 9, 1892, Owen Papers, ADAH.

Owen announced in the society's *Circular No. 4*, "should belong to the Society...although [they] may never be able to attend its meetings...The effect of membership...means cooperation, and support of a great movement." Marie Owen, as a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), lent support to her husband's work, suggesting that the two organizations would profit by collaboration.<sup>28</sup>

Owen's approach was hardly original. The key difference was not the brilliance of this correspondence campaign, but rather the extent of its range. Owen, member of any group that mildly interested him, arguably knew thousands of white Alabamians and many other people beyond the state line. Moreover, anyone outside Owen's network undoubtedly knew his powerful father-in-law. The proof is that when Owen wrote to people whom he wanted to join the society, they joined, by scores. Within two years, the AHS had 238 regular, dues-paying members, three-quarters of them recruited thanks to Owen.<sup>29</sup> The overwhelmingly majority were solidly upper- and middle-class white males, balanced by a smattering of high-society white women. Alabama's adjutant general joined, as did three public school superintendents; nine principals, teachers, and administrators of girls, normal, and technical colleges; a hospital superintendent; three officials on the state supreme court; faculty from the universities of Alabama, Auburn, and Sewanee; the state commissioner of agriculture; two state bishops; and a clerk at the Library of Congress. The number of professionals is strong evidence that New South Alabamians finally had time and means to spend on extracurricular activities. Corresponding members included secretaries of the Louisiana, New Jersey, and Tennessee historical societies,

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<sup>28</sup>Monroe, "Founding"; Finch, "Preserver"; *Circular No. 4*, 9; "Alabama Historical Society and Daughters of American Revolution, *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 29, 1899. The AHS gave notice in the *Florence Herald*, August 25, 1898, that it was starting up again. Owen's first public notice as secretary appeared the same day in the *Sumter County Sun*.

<sup>29</sup>The *Tuskaloosa Gazette*, June 22, 1899, put the total at 336.

War Department contract employee Marcus J. Wright, Princeton professor and later United States president Woodrow Wilson, and the *pater familias* of American scientific history, Hebert Baxter Adams. Twelve members besides Owen were in the SHA.<sup>30</sup>

By far Owen's greatest coup for the AHS was his addition of nine Alabama politicians to the membership rolls. The society already had Willis Brewer, a record collector and amateur historian representing the Fifth Congressional District. Then John Hollis Bankhead joined his son-in-law's organization, along with Congressman and Confederate veteran Henry Clayton of the Third District, George W. Taylor of the First District, state senators William G. Brown and D. C. Case, and Alabama's secretary of state, Robert P. McDavid. Rounding out the group were ex-governor and Progressive Thomas Goode Jones, and current governor Joseph Forney Johnston. Where there were politicians, Owen knew, there was publicity and, potentially, money. For good measure, when Governor Johnston joined the AHS Owen gently prodded him into the president's seat, setting an important precedent. Thereafter, the society's prestige and success would remain a personal priority for the state's executive branch.<sup>31</sup>

With Alabama's powerbrokers now well represented in the AHS, Owen convinced his legislative allies to introduce two new bills at the end of 1898. The first granted the AHS \$250 for two years "to aid in the publication of its transactions and papers." Owen planned to use the grant to revamp the society's journal, renamed *Transactions*, and fill its issues with first-rate historical scholarship.<sup>32</sup> The second bill was to establish the Alabama History Commission,

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<sup>30</sup>*Circular No. 4*, 11-15; Johnson, "Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past," 488-492. In the *Tuskaloosa Gazette*, April 6, 1899, a circular from Owen asked each potential member to send him names of five other people who might be similarly interested.

<sup>31</sup>*Circular No. 4*, 11-15; Monroe, "Founding."

<sup>32</sup>*Circular No. 4*, 7.

whose five members would include Owen, University of Alabama professor W. S. Wyman, and Auburn professor C. C. Thach, all appointed by Johnston in his capacity as president of the AHS. They would undertake the state records survey that Owen had envisioned four years prior, or as the bill stated:

...without compensation...[they shall] make a full, detailed and exhaustive examination of all of the sources and materials, manuscript, documentary and record of the history of Alabama from the earliest times, whether in domestic or foreign archives or repositories, or in private hands, including the records of Alabama troops in all wars in which they have participated...and...shall embody the result of the said examination in a detailed report to the Governor...with an account of the then condition of historical work in the State and with such recommendations as may be desirable.<sup>33</sup>

Representative William Brandon introduced the commission bill first, designated House No. 459, and got it passed with little commentary 62 to 15 on its first reading. House No. 460, the \$500 publication grant to AHS, came next and “evoked the season of oratory.”

Representative Patterson thought the historical society was trying to pull a fast one on the legislature, asking for money after having promised in the preceding bill that it would study and

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<sup>33</sup>Thomas McAdory Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission to the Governor of Alabama, December 1, 1900* (Montgomery: Brown Printing, 1901), 7. Owen had already floated the idea of a state historical commission a second time, in 1896, to several legislators, “but its promotion was not encouraged,” 6.

report on Alabama's records at no expense to the taxpayers. It seemed to him that the society did not deserve any public support.<sup>34</sup>

Representatives Samuel Harwood, John Jefferson Kelly, and William W. Screws vehemently defended the bill. All three appealed to their state's Confederate legacy in doing so, for Kelly and Screws were Confederate veterans. Harwood casually name-dropped Alabamian Confederate heroes Raphael Semmes and John Pelham "to stir the hearts of the opponents of the bill." Reminding his listeners that they were gathered where secessionist leaders William Yancey and Edward Bullock had once held forth, Screws expressed surprise "at the opposition which has developed against this measure." If the house should "vote down this proposition...to collect and preserve these records," then Alabama's "proud sons...will blush at the recital of their state's dishonor." Kelly followed Screws' "gallery of word pictures" with an implication that better historical scholarship, which was what the AHS represented, would have given him the rightful credit for rescuing a state regimental flag at the 1864 Battle of Resaca, Georgia, instead of two other Alabamians "who were not near the scene." Stunned by the triple assault, Patterson reversed course, explaining that "he had been under a misapprehension when he opposed the bill" and blaming the society's supporters for its misleading text. Bill 460 was carried 75 votes to 3.<sup>35</sup>

Two days after the Alabama House debates and in anticipation of the Senate vote, the *Montgomery Advertiser* came out in support of the bills. A state-supported history commission, the paper promised, would improve the state's education, give Alabamians incentive to help the

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<sup>34</sup>"The General Assembly," *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, December 7, 1898.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

AHS in the future, and provide the legislature a plan of attack for records preservation. Furthermore, neither bill would burden the state with creating salaries for permanent state historians. As for the \$500 publication grant, it was easily affordable, mere pocket change compared to the \$35,000 that North Carolina's legislature had set aside to publish its own records. For too long Alabama's rich history had been dismissed by outsiders; "[it] needs exploitation...in order that our State life should be known and read aright by those in the North and elsewhere who write our histories of the nation." Finally, Alabama's legislature should pass the bills so that it might accomplish at least one thing noteworthy that session.<sup>36</sup>

With the approval of the Alabama Senate, the Alabama History Commission was activated. After a brief inaugural meeting in Dr. Wyman's office in June, 1899, Owen became the chairman and the commissioners went to work. Because all were busy men with regular jobs, there was no possibility of their physically crisscrossing the length and breadth of Alabama, stopping at houses to rummage through trunks. That meant, as Owen later informed Governor Johnston, "the collection of information has necessarily been by correspondence, a method often tedious and slow, and in many cases without returns." The hassles of earning a living kept cropping up for him, too. Short of legal clients, Owen had to move his family to Birmingham in the midst of his commission work. Despite the magnitude of the project he had undertaken, Owen found it hard to turn down various groups craving his time and assistance. The Alabama Division of the UDC enlisted Owen's help in a campaign to preserve the original Confederate "White House" in Montgomery, while libraries at the state university and the capitol each tried to lure him with job offers. And in the meantime, Owen the amateur historian could not resist assembling an annotated revision of Albert Pickett's already sizeable 1851 *History of Alabama*.

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<sup>36</sup>"Alabama History," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 9, 1898.

All things considered, the commission moved at commendable speed, submitting its findings for printing by early 1901.<sup>37</sup>

Numbering 431 pages of text, the *Report of the Alabama History Commission* divided Alabama's records into five parts. There were three chapters on paper collections outside the state (Part I), three on paper collections in private hands (Part III), three on Alabama war records (Part IV), seven on the state's central, county, municipal, educational, ecclesiastical, and federal repositories (Part II), and another seven on Native American archeological studies (Part V). Owen drafted parts II and III, amounting to more than half of the report's total length, and contributed an additional two chapters to Part I identifying Alabama papers held by the federal government and neighboring states. Some of the data Owen gave was condensed from his two preceding works, the 1,248-page *Bibliography of Alabama* (1898) and 828-page *Bibliography of Mississippi* (1900), both done at the behest of the AHA's Historical Manuscripts Commission and certainly the ripened fruit of eleven previous years of personal collection.<sup>38</sup> Owen's part of the report demonstrates his inexhaustible reserves of energy and his capacity, under great pressure and limited time, to find, categorize, and occasionally comment on the value of hundreds of record groups.

For Alabamians curious about their state's papers, the *Report*---if they were willing to wade through it---gave them a fair idea of what was out there. In the simplest terms, there was a lot. The question then turned to what ought to be done about it. Owen and the other commissioners had a ready answer. The Progressive government of the South's most

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<sup>37</sup>Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 17; *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 15, 1899 and May 6, 1900; *Tuskaloosa Gazette*, April 11, 1900; *Our Mountain Home*, August 1, 1900.

<sup>38</sup>Posner, *American State Archives*.

progressive state must approach the problem progressively. Alabama had to take formal responsibility for all of its records, and “in a generous spirit appropriate funds to publish its archives and to maintain a Department of History.”<sup>39</sup>

It is uncertain whether Owen made up his mind on the matter long before the Alabama History Commission took shape, or whether his extensive work on the commission might have convinced him.<sup>40</sup> In midst of the debate on the commission bill, a few of Alabama’s politicians had already intimated that some kind of state-supported archival initiative was proper and bound to follow. Representative Screws had called the bill “this proposition...*to collect and preserve these records,*” even though the commission was only supposed to survey and make recommendations.<sup>41</sup> One day later, at the dedication of a monument to Alabama’s Confederate soldiers on the capitol grounds, former governor and current AHS member Thomas Jones had declared that it was the state’s responsibility to gather, write down, and hold onto information about veterans’ services. “Where may [an] Alabamian find a roll” of all Confederates, he had asked the crowd; “...among the archives of the State? They are not there.” Alabama’s Confederate women knew these names but they, along with their heroic menfolk, were dying out. When this wartime generation was gone, so would be its treasures of information, no matter what had been reprinted in newspapers or stuffed into family bibles, attics, or courthouses. Therefore, Jones cried, “let the voice of the people ‘throng in and become partakers of the councils of State,’ until the people’s representatives take away this reproach. It cannot be...that the State...may not...rightly expend money for the roll of their names or history of their

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<sup>39</sup>Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 43.

<sup>40</sup>To Mississippi researcher Alfred H. Stone, Owen portrayed the ADAH as a natural byproduct of its era: “In the evolution of methods of administration, the time had come when care and attention to its archives and history had become a duty on the part of the state,” Owen to Stone, April 9, 1902, Correspondence A-W, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>41</sup>“The General Assembly,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 7, 1898, [emphases mine].

achievements.”<sup>42</sup> In Jones’ blunt calculation---and Owen’s as well---state funding to discover records was worthless without further state funding to employ them usefully.

Then again, to Owen there was more to all this than merely the service of popular memory. While an amateur historian, a member of historical societies, a disciple of scientific history, and the chairman of a history commission, Owen was also a politico and a small-time office holder with his sights set on greater public service. He had to keep the political side of his project front and center in order to keep the state’s politicians, who after all held the purse strings, on his side. His appeal for state support therefore had to be couched in political terms.<sup>43</sup>

That ruled out adopting one standard arrangement between a state’s government and its historical society found in Midwestern states, principally Wisconsin. Under the “Wisconsin Plan,” as Owen termed it, the historical society, bankrolled by the government, collected every single historical manuscript it could for the use of scholars. All other papers created in the normal course of business by state branches or local authorities were the responsibility of their respective bureaus. From many contemporary historians’ perspectives, the Wisconsin Plan was ideal. Citizens paid to preserve old writings, historians had mountains of information at their fingertips, and the state, unconcerned about how scholars used the society’s holdings, left them alone. Owen agreed that Wisconsin had a workable arrangement, and it had spent lavishly on its

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<sup>42</sup>“To the Confederacy’s Soldiers and Sailors,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 8, 1898.

<sup>43</sup>Monroe, “Founding.”

historical society, to the tune of \$610,000 for the society's headquarters and research library (stocked with 275,000 titles), \$53,000 in endowments, and \$32,000 to cover sundry expenses.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless Owen rejected the Wisconsin Plan, doubting it could work in Alabama. Because a historical society would not care about any records that were not "old," it would never be bothered to save contemporary records still in use; indeed, legally it could not. An additional problem was that although scholars might interpret documents' contents correctly, they would probably try to arrange the documents topically, which could create a mess in cases where documents were multi-topical. Finally, because individual government bureaus would not care about any records they had not created, they would not cooperate with each other to save the whole. Every record maker and record keeper would work in isolation, through the prisms of their own interests and operating expenses. The result would be documentary annihilation through organizational compartmentalization. That would hardly be an improvement on the current situation, with all those Alabama documents in old cellars "moulding away and perishing." Anyway, some of Alabama's legislators had grumbled about the \$500 price tag for the AHS grant, so they were unlikely to match Wisconsin's financial largesse.<sup>45</sup>

What Alabama needed, Owen decided, was something entirely new. There should be a separate state Department of *Archives and History* (the order of the title must have been on purpose), with its own bureau chief answerable to the governor and legislature. It should take no orders from any other government department, nor from any county courthouse, board of aldermen, historical association, or special organization, yet as a central state agency should have

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<sup>44</sup>Owen to H. E. Bourne, October 29, 1904, Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, Record Group SG016719, AF-TO, ADAH; Finch, "Preserver," 67.

<sup>45</sup>Posner, *American State Archives*; Finch, "Preserver."

the power to receive records from them all. Old and new papers alike should go into the vaults of the archives department, from which they could be accessed by historians, policy makers, lobbyists, government employees, or private citizens. No longer should Alabamians have to roam from place to place looking for the records they needed; everything ought to be available at one location. The archives should also have a state library, a museum, and an art gallery. The AHS, meanwhile, could retain its budgetary and organizational independence. This constituted Owen's "Alabama Plan."<sup>46</sup>

Described this way, the Alabama state archives would be a boon to the state, not just to historians. And Owen, politician-cum-historian, could tailor the message to please the listener. In a speech before the state Episcopal diocese, Owen hewed to the scholarly side, mentioning the archives' in the context of "the value of history and historical studies," "detailed research work," and "knowledge of past events," with a subsidiary nod to "the State[']s...duty...to collect and preserve the current materials [on] its institutions...its public men" and "its public records." To an Alabamian in Congress however, Owen stressed how it would make it easier to do his job: "You know how satisfactory and convenient it is to be able to call for and obtain correct information on any subject at the shortest possible notice...[T]he Department will...[gather]

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<sup>46</sup>Owen to Bourne, October 29, 1904, Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 14; "A State Department of History," *Prattville Progress*, January 18, 1901; *Bulletin No. 1*; "Archives of Alabama," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 6, 1904. Owen later explained that in his department, *archives* "consist of papers and records that are out of use, and yet a part of the general history of the State," whereas *records* "are papers that are in current use, and of current necessity in the conduct of the state's affairs," "Archive Room in Basement of Capitol Nearly in Final Shape," *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 7, 1907.

current happenings, so that any one can apply for and receive all kinds of information; - historical, biographical, statistical, industrial, agricultural, etc.”<sup>47</sup>

The prospective department’s first publication would be an *Official and Statistical Register* of the state. That way, Progressive reforms could target the right spheres of society--- and Progressives could see how well they were doing and congratulate themselves. A circular letter to the AHS, asking for pressure on the legislature, presumed they would take a historical thrust. With his own hand, Owen composed 250 support letters in six days, constantly mixing scholarly and practical arguments<sup>48</sup>

Owen paid particular attention to timing in his new legislative appeals for support. There was a concurrent convention to revise the state’s 1875 constitution in the early 1901 session, starting in May. Supporters of revision, generally younger, educated delegates with strong business ties, wanted to strike out the last vestiges of fairly-conservative Reconstruction-era reforms and wall off any African-American or Populist counterchallenges after their challenges of the 1890s. Disfranchisement of blacks and uneducated, property-less whites, mitigated by a “grandfather clause” that specifically protected the vote for Confederate veterans, was to be the order of the day.<sup>49</sup> For Owen, the convention was also a godsend because it brought more than the usual number of bigwigs into Montgomery. The convention, too, needed up-to-date

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<sup>47</sup>“Address of Dr. Owen, Accepting the Portrait on Behalf of the State of Alabama,” n.d., Historical and Patriotic Societies, Record Group SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen to Amos Morton, January 31, 1901, Correspondence, A-W, SG016698, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>48</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1901,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence; *Bulletin No. 1*, 5; “Owen’s Circular Letter,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 12, 1901. Owen credited “the whole moral influence of the membership of the [AHS]...in the creating of public opinion favorable to State aid,” Owen to H. E. Bourne, December 10, 1904, Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, SG016719, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>49</sup>Malcolm Cook McMillan, *Constitutional Development in Alabama, 1798-1901: A Study in Politics, the Negro, and Sectionalism* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint, 1978); Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*.

statistical information, and Owen's archives department was designed to meet those needs. He quickly took advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity:

I felt that in this body were collected the representative men of every section of Alabama, and that if I could interest them I should have introduced a leaven whose influence would perpetually widen. From time to time during the session I invited them into my office, when I unfolded our plans. I was also enabled...to demonstrate the practical utility of the Department by responding to the requests of many delegates for statistical and other information as well as for books and documents, etc...<sup>50</sup>

The last hurdle for Owen was how to administer his department. He would have no serious opponent for the directorship, for in the *Tuskaloosa Gazette's* assessment "not a man in the state will oppose Mr. Thomas M. Owen for the place."<sup>51</sup> Even so, Owen wanted to secure the position without either grasping for it or leaving it up to chance. "It was felt that it would be fatal," Owen told an associate in the AHA, "to leave the selection of the Director either to a direct vote of the people, to an election by the Legislature, or to appointment by the Governor." His solution was to place a nine-member board of trustees over the department, each member serving a six-year, non-re-electable term, and let them appoint the director. The number of trustees was intentional, allowing Owen to bring on board representatives of each of Alabama's nine Congressional districts. As an ex-officio board member, Governor Johnston would "as far

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<sup>50</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1901," n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

<sup>51</sup>The *Fayette Banner*, February 28, 1901, considered Owen only the "probable" choice for the position.

as possible, lend every encouragement to [its] success and upbuilding.” The director would serve as secretary to the board.<sup>52</sup>

Owen had learned much since his first encounter with Alabama’s legislative processes in 1894. Then, he could not be bothered to get the powerful on his side or show them how they would benefit from backing him. This time around Owen was careful and strategic, first building a state historical agency, then building a state commission, and finally building a state bureau. All that remained was for Owen to get the archives plan, Bill No. 476, through the Alabama House and Senate. Owen’s brother-in-law, William Bankhead, used his family connections to steer the bill through, but thanks to Owen’s own politicking, it already had overwhelming support. “Although brought up in the last part of a busy session,” Owen remembered, “[it] was passed with but one dissenting vote in the Senate, and with but two...in the House.” Governor William J. Samford signed the act on February 27, 1901. The board met and, as expected, made Owen director on March 2, and with that the country lawyer from Bessemer was a state employee with a \$1,800 salary, a \$700 maintenance fund, an assistant, an unfurnished but strategically-located office in the Senate cloak room, a couple of storage rooms in the capitol basement, and the authority to gather Alabama’s records.<sup>53</sup>

Now, Owen had to decide which of those records should receive the lion’s share of attention. At the risk of repetition, Owen the avid collector believed in collecting *everything*. He sought old charters from Spanish and French colonial Alabama and materials in all formats and

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<sup>52</sup>*Tuskaloosa Gazette*, February 21, 1901; Owen to H. E. Bourne, December 10, 1904, Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, SG016719, AF-TO, ADAH; Monroe, “Founding”; *Bulletin No. 1*, 2-3.

<sup>53</sup>Monroe, “Founding”; Owen to Bourne, December 10, 1904, Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, SG016719, AF-TO, ADAH; *Bulletin No. 1*, 4-6; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1901,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence.

mediums on any later period of the state's history. His first annual report as director expanded the department's collection scope to encompass "practically all historical literature...for the history of the whole South" because "the history of Alabama...cannot be understood...save through the annals of the older States of the South Atlantic seaboard." Owen had to gather current government records too, a responsibility formalized in March, 1907 by an act requiring the department to handle legislative research.<sup>54</sup> Yet Owen intuitively understood that "everything" works better as an inner challenge than as a functional policy directive. Staffing, funding, and storage space were not limitless. His correspondence barrages on behalf of the archives needed to have a definite target. Partners, patrons, and the general public would want to know where Owen would focus his principal efforts. More importantly, they would want him to focus on what was most important to them.

And that was a war archive, as they made clear before the ADAH existed. Alabama's lawmakers already described the archives as a Confederate repository to their constituents. The *Montgomery Advertiser* spoke for many when it allowed that "while the operations of the proposed Department... are intended to cover every subject of historical activity...one thing which should above all others commend its establishment...is the completion and...publication of the records of Alabama soldiers in the Confederate war." For his part, Owen had gone on record saying that "one of the first duties which shall engage [his] attention" would be "to collect [and compile] all these [war records]...for all the current demands of students, writers, old soldiers, and others." Governor Johnston had echoed the *Advertiser* during the archives bill debate, implying that even if the department did no more than identify the correct names of the

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<sup>54</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, April 16, 1899; "Department of Archives and History of Alabama, No. 1," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 28, 1901; "Minutes and Annual Report, 1901," n. p.; "Items in the History and Administration of the Department, Legislation," Memorandum Book No. 1 "Personal" – History, SG030088, AF-TO, ADAH.

state's Confederate dead, it would be worth every penny spent on it.<sup>55</sup> Southern history itself gave extra weight to this priority: the Civil War had created large record groups and a legacy of intentional archival collection in the region where none had previously existed. Owen's plans were shaped for him before he had filed a single paper.

Privately Thomas Owen, who had started with university publications, might have been "undiscriminating" in what he collected for himself.<sup>56</sup> Pragmatically he might have been disinterested in what the ADAH acquired so long as it got everything it could. Professionally he might have considered current government records very important. Publicly however, Owen would accord wartime and Reconstruction-era records the highest priority. He would compose much more correspondence on Confederate materials than on any other historical subject. His numbered departmental columns in the *Montgomery Advertiser* would be preponderantly about war records. His research and publication projects would cluster heavily in the 1861-1865 timeframe. Under Thomas Owen's tenure, the Alabama Department of Archives and History would be a repository for many historical and contemporary materials, but it would mainly be an archive of the Lost Cause.

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<sup>55</sup>"Records of Alabama Soldiers," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 6, 1901; "A Busy Day With Solons," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 8, 1901; "Minor Matters," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 11, 1901; "Alabama War Records," *Confederate Veteran* 8 (1900): 40.

<sup>56</sup>Doster, "Owen," 99.

### 3. Owen's Acquisitions, Part I: The General Public, the Federal Government, and Heritage Organizations

An empty archive is a contradiction in terms. Before an archive does anything else, it increases, acquiring materials through purchase, inheritance, or donation. Unless that material is present, nothing more will happen, neither cataloging and description, nor reference or use. Yet before archivists can add materials to their repositories, they must first know what they are looking for, where to find it, who has it, and how to get it. Usually this is the most difficult part of their job.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Owen did not need anyone to tell him how important acquisitions were to the ADAH. "In reviewing the scope and relative importance of [my] duties," the director reported to the department's board of trustees at the end of his first year in office, "I determine[d] that what might be termed the 'collection feature' was most vital." Obvious as this might sound today, it was not so before 1901. The predominant American archival tradition, as seen earlier, was to publish select records already possessed. Research and writing were the real goals of any paper collector, and the actual collection merely a means to an end. Owen himself had produced some historical work of this sort in years past, and he would continue to indulge his scholarly side. At the same time, he determined that as an archival director he had to make collection the end, not the means. "There are a hundred writers to one genuine collector," Owen stated. "I have,

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<sup>1</sup> Maygene F Daniels and Timothy Walch, *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984).

therefore, done little historical writing, or literary work, as such, rather deeming such a course unimportant while a splendid field was ready for gleaning.”<sup>2</sup>

Owen matched deeds to words. Only a few weeks after being named director, he was, in the words of a Talladega newspaper, busy packing “ten tons” of “his great wealth of historical material” to ship to the archives’ basement storage. Settled in the Senate cloak room, Owen began creating registries for what he received. Log books variously labeled “Accession Register of Books,” “Accession Register of Relics...,” “Memorandum of Information,” “Register of Donors,” “Expense Books, and “Mailing Register” quickly clustered on Owen’s desk. In no time he was filling the logs with entry after entry. Every initial item related to the Civil War. Mrs. E. B. Jenkins, for example, dropped off three muster rolls for Alabama Confederate units on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, while on April 27<sup>th</sup> a Union veteran from Minnesota sent in miscellaneous, discarded papers he had scooped up thirty-six years earlier from the battlefield of Blakely, Alabama.<sup>3</sup> This early pattern of mostly-Confederate acquisitions would continue for the next nineteen years and beyond.

Owen also established an early template of what kind of Confederate documents to amass. The director had the option of collecting several types of Confederate materials in manuscript form, ranging from government documents to military records to intimate personal writings, if he chose. The vast majority of the Confederacy’s government and national military records already were available in print. Records detailing separate state military organizations

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<sup>2</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1901,” n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH. The archive was “still in the midst of the collecting era or state of our existence” at the time of the 1904 annual report, n. p., Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>“Alabama’s Proud History,” *Our Mountain Home*, March 20, 1901; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1901,” n. p.; “Register of Donors, 1901-1902,” 5, Registers of Gifts and Purchases of Books and Pamphlets, 1901-1978 (Access Restricted), ADAH.

such as Alabama's, however, were not found in the *OR*, and few other published document collections included them. These latter were the very materials that made possible veterans' pensions. Denied federal support, ex-Confederate states had previously established their own pension systems for veterans, with Alabama beginning as early as 1867. Spurred on by the advancing years of Confederate veterans such as his father, Owen---although still willing to take anything he could get---made Alabama's Confederate military records his department's priority.

He would have his hands full. Alabamians had formed at least sixty infantry units, fourteen cavalry units, twenty artillery units, several units of partisan rangers and sharpshooters, and a legion for Confederate service. In the infantry and cavalry branches moreover there were regiments, made up of ten companies, and battalions, which might have between three and eight companies. Some artillery units were independent companies known as batteries, comprising four to six artillery pieces with the men who operated them, while others were multi-battery battalions or regiments. Partisan rangers and sharpshooters organized into both regiments and battalions. The legion, known as Hilliard's Legion, was a type of unit common at the beginning of the war, mixing infantry, cavalry, and artillery companies.<sup>4</sup> Conservatively, Owen had to track down or reassemble close to 100 sets of records for each unit as a whole, plus upwards of 500 additional sets of records for each component company---and probably far more than that.

To complicate matters, it was not always clear from the records which unit was which. Upon formally mustering into the Confederate Army, each unit had been given a state designation, either a successive number or a personal or geographical name. Thus, the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Crute, *Units of the Confederate Army*, 1-40. The *Troy Messenger*, "Eighth Alabama," June 27, 1906, put the total number of Alabama Confederate units at 220.

Alabama Infantry Regiment had entered service in March, 1861, whereas the 20<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment had entered service that September. In the artillery, by comparison, the Barbour (County) Light Artillery organized in the spring of 1862, five months after the formation of Lumsden's Battery (named after its first commander, Captain Charles Lumsden) and three months after the formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Battalion. Although most units retained their original designations, several inadvertent duplications required revisions. For instance, there were two Alabama cavalry regiments called the 4<sup>th</sup>, one organized in October and the other in December, 1862. Confederate staff officers resorted to referencing them by their commanders' names: Roddy's 4<sup>th</sup> and Russell's 4<sup>th</sup>. The 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry Regiment was in some reports called the 7<sup>th</sup>, but not to be confused with a different 7<sup>th</sup> regiment. A single infantry battalion was originally designated the 4<sup>th</sup>, then later became the 15<sup>th</sup>, and finally the 16<sup>th</sup>. The 62<sup>nd</sup>, 63<sup>rd</sup>, and 65<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments were semi-officially the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> reserve regiments, while the intervening 64<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment never completed its formal organization. Too, a battery might change its name with a new commander.<sup>5</sup> All of this left even some Alabama veterans quite confused about which units they had served in.

For each Alabama Confederate unit, moreover, Owen had to find several different kinds of records. Any unit larger than a company was required to keep a roster listing its field and staff officers, those responsible for exercising overall command and handling administration including record-keeping. At regimental size, a unit's field and staff included a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, a major, an adjutant, a surgeon, a chaplain, a sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, and a commissary sergeant. When possible the adjutant, surgeon, chaplain, and quartermaster and commissary sergeants had assistants, who might or might not appear on the roster.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Individual companies kept muster rolls which included the commissioned and non-commissioned officers (one captain, two lieutenants and a handful of sergeants and corporals) and all enlisted men. Officers created muster rolls when a company was formally sworn into state service and later into Confederate service. Less common than rosters or muster rolls, but no less valuable, were company descriptive rolls specifying soldiers' personal features---eye and hair colors, heights, and ages---and payrolls. Officers were supposed to update their units' records regularly, at the end of campaigns, at quarterly intervals, in calendar years, and when there were any significant internal changes.<sup>6</sup>

Change characterizes any military organization, and this was no less true of Alabama's Confederate companies, battalions, and regiments. Field and staff officers died, resigned, were promoted or reassigned. Company officers, if not killed in battle or incapacitated by wounds, disease, or sickness, might become part of the field and staff. Beyond regular attrition, officer slots were hardly static, for in the first half of the war command was subject to democracy. The rank-and-file elected their original company commanders. Even after the First and Second Conscription Acts of 1862 made military service compulsory for most adult white males, Confederate companies held elections to confirm or replace incumbent officers, as specified in the new laws. And of course, from the beginning until the last days of the Confederacy enlisted men came and went at dizzying rates. Privates volunteered, were conscripted, substituted for draft dodgers with money, succumbed to the hazards of service, went off to hospitals, deserted, were detached for special duties, or simply slipped through the army's organizational cracks---often all the above in the space of a few months or weeks. The paperwork documenting the

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<sup>6</sup>*Army Regulations adopted for the use of the Army of the Confederate States, in accordance with late acts of Congress* (Atlanta: Gauldin & Whitaker, "Intelligencer" Print, 1861); Brent Nosworthy, *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003).

entirety of this flux was nearly infinite in mass, and due to the constant turnover and campaigning there were plenty of faulty records.

Captain William Henry Fowler had labored mightily to bring some order out of the chaos as Alabama's wartime records superintendent. Against considerable odds, he secured rosters and muster rolls for most of the state's Confederate units by the spring of 1865. Fowler kept some records in Richmond because they came from units in the Army of Northern Virginia, which defended that part of the Confederacy. The rest, pertaining to units in the trans-Appalachian Army of Tennessee and others in state service, went to Montgomery. Unfortunately, that same season the final Union military offensives of the war got underway, targeting Richmond and Montgomery. While Fowler managed to spirit the Richmond records to safety, he lost many of the Montgomery records when Union cavalry under General James H. Wilson took the undefended city at the end of the war. In an article on Fowler's work, Owen noted with pleasure that "John B. Taylor, Esq., State Agent," spirited several bundles of records out of the city ahead of Wilson's raiders and later brought them back to Montgomery, along with the Richmond-deposited records. The AHS and a succession of state adjutant generals rounded up a few more papers just before the ADAH was founded.<sup>7</sup>

While working for the state historical commission, Owen helped fellow commissioner Samuel Will John unpack and process Fowler's papers. Therein were muster rolls for 58 militia companies organized in 1860, when fears of Lincoln's likely electoral victory and rumors of slave uprisings had prompted partial mobilization, and for 96 companies raised in 1861. In some

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<sup>7</sup>Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*; Thomas M. Owen, "The Work of William Henry Fowler as Superintendent of Army Records, 1863-1865," in Owen, ed., *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1897-1898*, Vol. 2 (Tuscaloosa: N. p., 1898), 186n; "The Alabama Historical Society," *Greenville Advocate*, July 15, 1885; "Preservation of Old State Records," *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 11, 1893.

cases, the rolls were originals on state-supplied forms from the war years. In others the information was hastily jotted down on stray scraps after Appomattox. Three packages of papers listed field, staff, and company officers appointed in the first two years of the war, supplemented by county reports of local companies reorganized after the Conscription Acts. A company's original self-designation---the Covington Hunters, the Montgomery Rifles, the Tuskegee Zouaves---often disclosed where it had been organized, and if the company's first captain was known Owen then could cross-reference his information with previously-published regimental summaries from Brewer's *Alabama War Record*, the publishers J. S. Perry & F. L. Smith's city directory of Montgomery, or the Alabama volume of *Confederate Military History*.<sup>8</sup>

As he compiled the commission's report, Owen found that Alabama had more-or-less complete personnel data on its 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, and 47<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments. Among other units information was incomplete, in varying degrees. Owen had full, ten-company rolls for a further nine infantry regiments, lacking only their field and staff rosters. He had the names of all original captains in the 30<sup>th</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, and 37<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment but could not yet match them to their respective companies. On the other end of the scale there was one alphabetized list of soldiers' names for the 18<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment, without ranks or companies, and nothing at all for the 15<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, or 23<sup>rd</sup> infantry regiments. Rosters and rolls were unavailable for most artillery, cavalry, and sharpshooter units. Owen inherited a tangled, messy

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<sup>8</sup>Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 332-352; Willis Brewer, *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men, From 1540 to 1872* (Montgomery: Barrett & Brown, 1872); *Directory of the City of Montgomery and Historical Sketches of Alabama Soldiers* (Montgomery: Perry & Smith, 1866); Joseph W. Wheeler, *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History, In Twelve Volumes, Written by Distinguished Men of the South, and Edited by Gen. Clement A. Evans of Georgia, Vol. 7 – Alabama* (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Company, 1899).

conglomeration of records along with the responsibility to fix them. “I have found the task difficult,” he confessed to the board of trustees at the end of his first year as director.<sup>9</sup>

From his earlier research on his father’s regiment however, Owen knew that the veterans or their families frequently had or could reproduce regimental, battalion, and company papers. He also knew that the United States War Department kept the Confederate national archives, in which there would likely be some of Foster’s collected papers.<sup>10</sup> Still other rosters and rolls were in the private collections of Owen’s scholarly friends. Owen’s first and greatest task as director was to get all these disparate parties on board with the effort to complete the records of Alabama’s Confederate soldiers. Success depended on Owen’s ability to find knowledgeable people, state forthrightly what he wanted, and convince his contacts to work with him.

It helped Owen immeasurably that he had newspaper friends. The state press generally had been Owen’s champion since he had reformed the AHS, no paper more so than the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Staffed by partners such as ex-Confederate Major William Screws, the *Advertiser* had thrown its weight behind Owen in the legislative battles over the state historical commission and the archives department. Once the archives were established, the editors invited Owen to contribute a regular column, under the departmental banner head, in the Sunday edition. “Through the public spirit of the [Advertiser’s] management,” Owen informed Alabamians in the archives’ opening column, “the director...has been accorded the courtesy of publishing at

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid; “Minutes and Annual Report,” 1901, n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence.

<sup>10</sup>The *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 17, 1903, “Alabama Soldiers,” reported that the War Department had muster rolls for “four thousand commands” from Alabama; this is probably an error in transcription.

irregular intervals notes and items in reference to his work...This privilege has been accepted in the hope that...thereby attention would be more directly brought to its needs and character.”<sup>11</sup>

Owen launched a major acquisitions campaign with *Advertiser* column, although he started slowly. The long list of items recently donated in column “No. 1” (July 28, 1901), mostly publications, showed public spirit initially high. Owen noted that he had received the first volumes of the Wisconsin Historical Society’s journal, a full set of *New York Tribune* issues covering the war and Reconstruction years, and a score of antebellum Alabama newspapers. Influential donors gave Owen oil portraits of Confederate generals and early Alabama politicians. The AHS gave Owen “the most extensive addition” to his archives, contributing such items as six bound volumes of French colonial records, sixteen volumes on the holdings in Canada’s archives, twenty-five volumes of *The American Antiquarian*, and a full set of issues for the *Tuscaloosa Monitor* and *Tuscaloosa Blade*, violently unreconstructed post-bellum newspapers run by Confederate veteran and notorious Klansman Ryland Randolph. “Alabama War Records” filled only a small section of the inaugural column. UDC members and a few veterans had sent in historical sketches of Emery’s, Sengstak’s, and Waddell’s Alabama batteries, muster rolls for two companies in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments, a descriptive roll of Bellamy’s battery, a couple of wartime paroles, and an original payroll sheet for Company D, 37<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment.<sup>12</sup>

Owen did not mention war records at all in column “No. 2” (August 4, 1901), a brief entreaty to donate specific items for the archives’ library, museum, and gallery. Column “No. 3”

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<sup>11</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1901,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence; “Department of Archives and History, No. 1,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 28, 1901.

<sup>12</sup>“No. 1,” *ibid.* The *Tuscaloosa News*, “Death of Ryland Randolph,” May 8, 1903, reported that before he died Randolph himself sent Owen copies of two of his later papers, the *True Issue* and the *Independent Monitor*.

(August 11, 1901), on the other hand, was almost entirely about acquiring Confederate military papers. “Next to current business,” Owen reminded readers, “the compilation...of the records of Alabama troops is emphasized as of the very first importance.” Owen inserted a condensed version of Part IV of the historical commission report, pared down to unit names and dates of organization, “in order that all interested persons may understand the condition of the official records [from which] the lists...have been prepared.” He listed forty-seven units, and “where no command is mentioned it is to be understood that there are no records.” The latter is a curious statement given that Owen omitted the 5<sup>th</sup> infantry battalion, the 6<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment, and the 56<sup>th</sup> cavalry regiment, even though in his historical commission work he had discovered a few rolls for each one. Equally inexplicable was Owen’s failure to mention the rolls he had for eighteen companies of Hilliard’s Legion.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Owen misrepresented the full extent of his holdings to instill urgency in the hearts of would-be contributors. If so, the little trick worked, at least for a while. In column “No. 4” (August 18, 1901), Owen announced that “since the publication...last Sunday of the lists of existing records of Alabama soldiers, the Director has received a number of letters from survivors and others, supplying data to fill up gaps.” “A number” apparently meant only a few, as evidenced by Owen’s brief list, in column “No. 6” (September 1, 1901), of records received since the third column. He now had a roll for another company in the 56<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment (B), a history of the 58<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment---which would take up nearly all available space when it

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<sup>13</sup>“Department of Archives and History, No. 2,” August 4, 1901, and “No. 3,” August 11, 1901 (both *Montgomery Advertiser*). On the plus side, Owen had since added a muster roll for Company E, 56<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment.

was published in column “No. 10” (September 29, 1901)---and another veteran’s notes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiment.<sup>14</sup>

Owen sought personal material as well as official records, and in column “No. 11” (October 6, 1901) he noted that B. S. McMillan had contributed his father’s “Reminiscences of the War of 1861” and “Notes on Southern Political Conditions in 1860.” The archives had received eight letters written by Major James F. Waddell of the 6<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment in time to publish them in an earlier unnumbered column. General Moses W. Hannon, former commander of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Alabama Cavalry Regiment (Partisan Rangers), had contributed some of his official wartime correspondence. In terms of recently-sent unit records, there was a company roster from the 17<sup>th</sup> infantry, a roster and sketch of the 49<sup>th</sup> infantry, and a roster and sketch of Lumsden’s Alabama Battery.<sup>15</sup> The latter two were the first materials the archives had received for those respective units.

Towards the end of the year, the archives’ column sounded an unexpected note of desperation. Four muster rolls for companies in the 25<sup>th</sup> and 46<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments had come in before column “No. 15” (November 3, 1901) went to press. Considering the number and extent of records needed, that acquisition amounted to less than a sliver of the whole. So far as Owen was concerned, Alabamians were not contributing enough. The director spoke candidly on the issue in column “No. 18” (December 1, 1901): “Notwithstanding repeated invitations and requests, but few responses in reference to Alabama war records have been received. It is hard to understand why those who have papers will not permit their use by the State.” Without public

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<sup>14</sup>“No. 4,” August 18, 1901, “No. 6,” September 1, 1901, and “No. 10,” September 29, 1901 (all *Montgomery Advertiser*).

<sup>15</sup>“No. 11,” October 6, 1901, and “Unpublished Letters,” September 8, 1901 (both *Montgomery Advertiser*). Owen repeated his plea in the *Marion Times Standard*, June 15, 1905 and again in the *Montgomery Times*, June 5, 1915.

willingness to compile, reproduce, or contribute papers, “it is useless to talk of correcting errors in history.” Owen was doing his part, he added, having assembled revised muster rolls for three companies of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments and the 3<sup>rd</sup> cavalry regiment. He expected Alabamians, whether veterans or veterans’ families, to do their fair share too, like those who had submitted rolls for companies in the 5<sup>th</sup> infantry battalion, the 1<sup>st</sup> heavy artillery battalion, and the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup>, and 59<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments.<sup>16</sup>

As these submissions indicated, gaps were being filled, albeit slowly. Owen decided that greater specificity might fill the ones remaining. Starting with column “No. 18,” he began running sketches from older compilations, such as Brewer’s *Record* and Perry & Smith’s directory, on Alabama units that remained incomplete. In that column, for example, Owen inserted a Perry & Smith extract on Cantey’s Brigade, a parent organization that had included the unrepresented 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments. The next week’s column included an extract from the same source on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, and the one following included an extract on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, and 45<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments. A Perry & Smith extract on the 7<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry Regiment constituted all of column “No. 21” (December 22, 1901). Owen’s stated goal was to get readers to point out errors in these brief narratives before the ADAH published its own series of unit histories, but surely he hoped that they would also send in further rolls and rosters. And war materials did keep coming in, although after column “No. 30” (April 6, 1902) Owen stopped listing their acquisition. A 1903 appeal in a Greenville newspaper for the rolls of companies F,

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<sup>16</sup>“No. 15,” November 3, 1901, and “No. 18,” December 8, 1901 (both *Montgomery Advertiser*).

G, H, and J of the 17<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment was the last occasion when Owen specified his Confederate unit wants in the press.<sup>17</sup>

The final numbered column, “No. 31” (April 13, 1902), synthesized all the secondary source material Owen had gathered on Alabama’s contribution to the Confederate States Army. He listed every general and aide-de-camp from the state with dates of commission into Confederate service. Owen also listed every unit raised by Alabama, the names of the units’ successive colonels, and their birthplaces, brief service details, and addresses if living. There was no indication of which units were critically short of records, or by how much.<sup>18</sup> Events suggest that Owen had concluded by this point that he could best gain rosters and muster rolls through personal interactions rather than published appeals.

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After a year of press announcements in Alabama, Owen only had information for one-sixth of the 125,000 men he estimated had fought in the state’s Confederate units. A few days sifting through the Confederate government archives in Washington might be time better spent. Announcing his trip and intentions in a Huntsville newspaper, Owen left for the capital in the

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<sup>17</sup>“No. 18,” “No. 19,” December 8, 1901, “No. 20,” December 17, 1901, “No. 21,” December 22, 1901, and “No. 30,” April 6, 1902 (all *Montgomery Advertiser*); “Company C 17<sup>th</sup> Ala. Regiment,” *Greenville Advocate*, April 29, 1903. Revisions and corrections from the public were sometimes inaccurate, as for example when one Alabamian faulted Owen for not including Tennessean Leonidas Polk and Arkansan Patrick Cleburne in his list of Alabama Confederate generals in column “No. 31,” W. S. Reese to Owen, April 14, 1902, Correspondence, SG016700, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>18</sup>“No. 31,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 13, 1902.

spring of 1902. The director however was traveling blind; he had no idea what records were in the Confederate archives, because the War Department had not told him.<sup>19</sup>

Owen ought to have been forewarned, for he had had trouble dealing with the War Department before. When the state historical commission earlier tried to assemble “detailed lists of existing material” in the War Department’s care, it had come up short. The two main difficulties were the department’s “peculiar regulations,” and their unbending enforcer, Brigadier General Frederick C. Ainsworth. A spit-and-polish military professional, former surgeon, and quintessential bureaucrat, the Vermont-born Ainsworth initially had come to the head of the Records Office of the War Department in 1892 as a reformer. Back then, an Alabama newspaper asserted, “it took days and sometimes weeks for the pension office, which was dependent on the [Records Office], to find out just what was the record during the war of any given soldier.” Ainsworth had rolled up his sleeves, “weeding out the superannuated and lazy clerks in the department” and reducing the average turnaround time for record requests to a half-hour. After straightening up his personnel, Ainsworth turned to the records themselves. From a lifetime of armed service he knew that United States military records papers were brittle, and Confederate papers even more so. Repeated handling by pension seekers, historians, and government officials would destroy the papers and their precious information. Rather than run that risk, Ainsworth applied a then-innovative index card system. Records Office clerks began copying all data onto the more durable cards, at one swipe saving wartime records and gradually reducing

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<sup>19</sup>“Roster of Soldiers,” *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, April 23, 1902. In a June 27, 1902 letter, Owen confessed his doubts “[that] we have the detail[ed] records of even one-third of the troops enrolling from Alabama,” Owen to Fred L. Robertson, Correspondence, AF-TO, ADAH.

the department's physical space requirements. In time a number of record-keeping institutions would adopt the index card system, including the ADAH.<sup>20</sup>

The unfortunate flipside of Ainsworth's innovation was that the Records Office became too busy making intra-office copies to assist outside parties. Nor, in the general's considered opinion, was it his department's main duty to serve the public. "To Ainsworth's mind," an archival biographer has written, "the war records of the nation were not public property...they belonged to...the government itself, and...should be used only by high federal officials." Ainsworth took his guardianship of soldiers' service records quite seriously. The records he kept "were of a 'confidential nature' which demanded that they be withheld from the eyes of contemporary generations, [in order] that 'improper use' of their information might not be blamed on him."<sup>21</sup>

So when Alabama's commissioners contacted Ainsworth in 1900, he had told them exactly what he told everyone else. His card-copying clerks would not drop everything to retrieve specific records, unless the contact was a veteran in need of materials for a pension application. In special circumstances, "and as may be *actually necessary*," the Records Office might respond to requests from "any State, or any relief association" working towards the same end. Acceptable petitioners still had to follow a 27-point application process to the letter before they would receive anything. Assistance from the Records Office for "the compilation of

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<sup>20</sup>Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 21; "The Record Division," *Prattville Progress*, May 20, 1904; Siert F. Riepma, "A Soldier-Archivist and His Records: Major General Fred C. Ainsworth," *American Archivist* 4 (July 1941):178-187; Owen to the Secretary of War, October 2, 1907, Classification, Record Group SG016721, AF-TO, ADAH; "Minutes and Annual Report, 1911."

<sup>21</sup>Riepma, "A Soldier Archivist," 185. G. Philip Bauer, "Public Archives in the United States," in Haseltine & McNeil, *In Support of Clio*, 49-78, finds other federal record-keepers in the 1890s just as rigidly proprietary.

statistics or other data relative to particular organizations” was quite out of the question. The commission, established for exactly that purpose, consequently got nowhere with Ainsworth.<sup>22</sup>

Neither did Owen two years later. After ten days in Washington, Owen returned to Alabama empty-handed. According to Owen, Ainsworth had allowed him to glance into one of the Confederate archives repository rooms, but not to open any of the “eighty-six large boxes” inside. The two had then discussed whether the ADAH could get copies of Alabama soldiers’ records. Owen gave two versions of this interview, a public one to the *Advertiser* and the other at year’s end to the board of trustees. In the newspaper version, Owen claimed that Ainsworth “had the subject under advisement, and would in a short time furnish [the Alabama archives] with a statement as to the exact records [on] file, with an estimate of the cost for copying.”<sup>23</sup>

A partially successful mission, then? Not when compared with Owen’s report to the board in the 1902 annual report. There, the story was that Washington military bureaucrat had stiff-armed him. Owen had reminded Ainsworth of a recent Congressional act admonishing the War Department to do all in its power to help the states assemble their Civil War service records. “He agreed that we had a right to call on him in the name of the State,” Owen told the board. “He stated, however...that the cost of making these copies would be several thousand dollars, and that even if we paid for them he did not care for us to secure them.” Owen could neither charm nor reason with Ainsworth: “I became satisfied that he did not wish us to have [the

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<sup>22</sup>Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 323.

<sup>23</sup>“Looking for Records,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 2, 1902.

records], and that he would throw any obstacle he could in our way to getting them.” Owen implied that he might have to go over Ainsworth’s head, to Secretary of War Elihu Root.<sup>24</sup>

Owen soon did just that, and the secretary proved accommodating. Root already had received a litany of complaints about Ainsworth from other southern state archivists, including director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) Dunbar Rowland. Southern pressure on the War Department built in the United States Senate, producing in February, 1903 a stronger act directed at the Records Office. The next month Root dashed off a letter to Owen proposing a joint federal-state records compilation program. The Confederate national archives, Root told Owen, contained thousands of names of Alabama soldiers, but little other information. Records Office clerks had been frustrated trying to match men to units. Root presumed that the ADAH had at least skeletal rosters and rolls. By finding company officers’ names on both sets of records, it should be easier to determine the rest of the names of any one company’s men. Therefore, Alabama should loan all of its unit records to the War Department. Root encouraged other southern states to do the same. At the end of this long process the federal government would publish separate, state service records in bound volumes for all Confederate soldiers. A few weeks later Ainsworth too agreed to cooperate, but insisted that because of the wording of the legislation he could accept only original rosters and rolls, not copies.<sup>25</sup>

Owen immediately released the news that “fifty [War Department] clerks are now engaged in the work.” He hoped this would encourage hold outs in Alabama to send in their original records at once. Owen was not disappointed, for as he later informed the board “I have

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<sup>24</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1902,” n. p, Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence.

<sup>25</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1903,” 2; *Bulletin No. 1*; “Compiling the Records of Alabama Soldiers,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 4, 1903,

[since] received a large number of original rolls...commissions, letters, and paroles.” Some contacts sent in “compiled rolls” made up from memory, but thanks to the timely press announcement Owen also obtained “full rolls” for the undocumented 9<sup>th</sup> infantry battalion, as well as the 37<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment.<sup>26</sup>

The federal-state service records project nonetheless got off to an uncertain start. Owen and other delegates representing Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, met in the Georgia state library in Atlanta on July 20, 1903. Comparing notes, they agreed that the main problem was Ainsworth. As Owen later noted in that year’s report, “this rule...that only original materials would be admitted in the compilation...was found [so] restrictive as to work for a hardship.” Original rosters and muster rolls too were proving to be hard to come by. Compiled rosters and rolls, fashioned de novo by state officials working closely with veterans, were more common, and therefore ought to be the basis for the project. Yet for the sake of pensioners the compilations had to be accurate. It would take time to contact every known survivor of a Confederate unit, time for them to respond, and time to compare their responses. A group petition to the War Department from the Atlanta gathering spelled out these reservations and begged for flexibility. The delegates wanted to submit compiled rosters and rolls, countersigned by their governors, where originals were unavailable; they wanted an open-ended timetable for submitting records; and they insisted on examining the War Department’s proof sheets before any records were published.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>“Rolls of the Confederacy,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 5, 1903.

<sup>27</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1903,” 2-3; *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 2, 1903; “Ask Modifications,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 23, 1903.

For extra political firepower, North Carolina delegate and state auditor B. F. Dixon hand-carried the petition to Washington in early January 1904, accompanied by Virginia governor Andrew Jackson Montague. They went straight to Secretary Root, but to little avail. On the one hand, Root assured the Southerners that the Confederate national archives included soldier records up to February, 1865, and that with state cooperation the Confederate rosters would be “almost perfect.” On the other hand, the secretary upheld Ainsworth. Root preferred “[an original] roster that was [im]perfect, so far as it went,” Dixon disclosed in a public letter, “than...a more complete one with the probability that it might contain names not entitled to be placed upon it.” Root and Ainsworth feared nothing so much as pension fraud, an understandable fear stemming from Gilded Age ambivalence towards Civil War pensioners in the Northern states. White Southerners by contrast, largely denied federal pension largesse, had few objections to soldier pensions and fewer supposed soldiers likely to lie about having served the Union. Yet as Root pointed out to Dixon, if the department modified its stance on acceptable records for ex-Confederates, it would have to do the same for Union veterans. Root portrayed a thieving army of thousands of fraudulent Union pensioners standing poised, waiting for any minor changes in the department’s policies which would make it easier for them to rip off the federal government. The War Department could not take that chance. Root’s refusal fractured the unity of the delegates back in Atlanta, who quickly dispersed. Henceforth southern state record keepers would try to work individually with Ainsworth, some, like Rowland, to great success.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>“Record of Soldiers,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 13, 1904; James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Director Complimented,” *Birmingham News*, December 26, 1904; Lisa Spencer & Heather Mitchell, “The Mississippi Plan’: Dunbar Rowland and the Creation of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History,” *Provenance* 22 (January 2004): 51-72. Dixon told the *Selma Times*, January 3, 1904, on the eve of the Washington

Reluctant to follow that path, Owen took some time getting back to the War Department, ultimately going in through the back door in the summer of 1909. He asked J. W. Cheney, the department librarian, for a copy of Alabama Confederate companies' self-designations. Cheney diplomatically bucked Owen up the chain of command, admonishing him to write directly to Ainsworth---probably the last thing Owen wanted to do---and not to mention that he had approached Cheney first. Another letter to Ainsworth surprisingly got Owen what he wanted, or at least the War Department's partial list, and an invitation for limited reciprocity. Owen opted instead to find another, more amenable insider. Former Confederate Marcus J. Wright was still clerking for the Department, so Owen reached out to him. "This letter will be regarded as confidential," Owen told Wright at the end of a request for the same information he had sought from Cheney and Ainsworth. Wright detailed a clerk to make Owen's copies, and accepted the five dollars Owen sent as recompense.<sup>29</sup> A rear channel partnership between the ADAH and the War Department was now up and running.

Owen's next request cut right to the chase: he wanted "such historical data or memoranda in reference to the organization and subsequent history" of every Alabama Confederate unit. Wright, no doubt overworked, did not respond. Owen then shifted his approach. He remarked that Charles Edgeworth Jones' recent *Georgia in the Civil War* contained an abundance of detailed unit information. Jones must have gotten some of that information from the War Department; had Wright supplied it? If so, could Owen have similar material for Alabama? Wright acknowledged that he had assisted Jones, out of a desire to help all the southern states

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mission that "in the matter of [original] rolls...North Carolina is very much better prepared...and hence would be affected but little" if it failed, "while other states would be greatly affected."

<sup>29</sup>Owen to J. W. Cheney, June 5, 1909, Cheney to Owen, June 8, 1909, Frederick C. Ainsworth to Owen, June 14, 1909, Owen to Marcus J. Wright, June 21 and July 8, 1909, Wright to Owen, June 24, 1909, Owen's Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, Record Group SG016726, AF-TO, ADAH.

perfect and publish their wartime records. Moreover, Wright liked Owen, telling him “you have shown an interest and energy which should be copied by Sons of other Southern states.” Wright would help Owen, but the director had to keep in mind that Wright was a federal government employee who did not want to lose his cushy job. Money did not concern Wright, because whatever he received would go to clerks he hired after hours to do the actual work. Mainly, Wright was busy, so Owen would need to be patient. They could start with an outline modeled on Jones’, which Wright could amend or fill in.<sup>30</sup>

Owen assembled and sent the outline and together he and Wright worked through it. Were there battle or organizational reports for an attached list of Alabama companies, Owen asked? What about the state’s staff officers? What about conscription records? No, Wright replied, but most of that information was available in print. Could Wright copy the relevant parts of those printed sources? No, Wright could not, “I am too busy & old to make copies...I must have them made by typewriters at their usual charges.” Would Wright look over a list of Confederate companies raised in Barbour County and let Owen “whether I have left out items which ought to be noted”? The list was complete and well put together, Wright answered. Was Wright aware of any printed list of “all military camps, military posts, conscript camps, camps of instruction, etc., etc., maintained by the Confederacy or by the several States”? Wright did not think there was such a list in print.<sup>31</sup>

As quickly as Wright dealt with one matter, Owen raised another. Although the partnership ran smoothly most of the time, on occasion the ex-Confederate thought that Owen

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<sup>30</sup>Owen to Wright, August 10 and October 22, 1909; Wright to Owen, October 14, October 22, and November 8, 1909, Owen’s Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, ADAH.

<sup>31</sup>Owen to Wright, January 2, May 25, and June 8, 1910; Wright to Owen, January 27, May 28 and June 8, 1910, Owen’s Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, ADAH.

was dumping his own work off on Wright's elderly, burdened shoulders. Once, Owen sent Wright a 44-page list of all Civil War battles, skirmishes, and military affairs in which Alabama Confederate troops had taken part. He asked for "every name, number, date, and the names of numbers of Alabama troops corrected or added to wherever necessary. I assume," Owen assured Wright, "that it can be done with comparative ease, or rather from compilations easily available to you." This was too much for a frazzled Wright. "To compare these sheets with the 130 volumes of the [OR] would be a work of several weeks, perhaps a month," Wright responded, "and not as you write with 'comparative ease.'" Surely Owen remembered that Wright had other, official duties that came first? If Owen was willing to pay \$25, Wright would get "a competent person to do the work [which] I will supervise & see that [it] is well done, for which I want no pay." Better yet, Wright suggested, "[as] you have a copy of the Official Records...make the examinations yourself & thus save paying any one."<sup>32</sup> Owen let the issue drop.

The collaboration continued a little longer, with Owen submitting a preliminary historical sketch for the 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment for critique, and Wright offering a few suggestions and complimenting Owen's "eye to accuracy." Owen again needled Wright about Confederate staff officer lists however, insinuating that the department must have them but Wright probably had overlooked them. He then asked Wright to look through rolls for the 17<sup>th</sup> sharpshooter battalion for any interesting details. A weary Wright instead decided to wrap things up with Owen. "I write you a formal and strictly confidential letter," Wright confided, "...to tell you that I am fond of you personally, and have the highest confidence in your ability to discharge

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<sup>32</sup>Owen to Wright, June 13, 1910; Wright to Owen, June 21, 1910, Owen's Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, ADAH.

the important duties you have for the State of Alabama.” Nonetheless, “you do not know how I am handicapped here.” Wright, as he had said before, was old and tired, and although he was too polite to say it, Owen’s requests had become onerous. Moreover, the War Department had been stung by a nasty review in the *Richmond Dispatch* from yet another disgruntled state official looking for records. The editorial had made the department’s division chiefs doubly cautious, and the chief of Wright’s division apparently had uncovered, or was about to uncover, what Wright had been doing. No more rear channel communications, Wright told Owen. He had better learn to work with Ainsworth, promoted to major-general and since 1907 Adjutant General of the army. Straightforward-yet-polite requests should do the trick.<sup>33</sup>

That was exactly the wrong thing to tell Owen. “I have only one response,” Owen replied heatedly, “and that is, that such an appeal would be altogether useless.” Owen’s past experiences with Ainsworth had proven that he was an impossible person to work with: “I am personally in hearty sympathy with [the editorial]. Gen. Ainsworth’s conduct...is simply outrageous, not only that he is personally insolent and ungentlemanly in his deportment with callers...If he does not beware of his conduct...it will be his undoing.” Ainsworth’s superiors were no better. With the exception of Root, they had largely been under the general’s thumb. Owen was disgusted by how “[the Secretaries of War] appear to be altogether wanting in courage to handle the situation except in obedience to [Ainsworth’s] dictates.” Owen further blasted Wright’s employer. “I desire to say,” Owen declared with forgivable exaggeration, “that there is no place or country anywhere on the globe where there is not now the freest access given to the use of official archives, with the single exception of the U.S. War Department.” The

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<sup>33</sup>Owen to Wright, July 1 and 7, 1910; Wright to Owen, July 7 and 11, 1910, Owen’s Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, ADAH.

director therefore would not work with the federal government any further if that meant working with Ainsworth. He also ended his communications with Wright, apart from a quick note in 1912 that he would return some borrowed books, and a request in September, 1910 for some copies of Ainsworth's index cards for Alabama troops, which Wright not surprisingly ignored.<sup>34</sup>

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Getting records from the War Department had only been one line of attack anyway. Owen had record-collecting contacts closer to home, friends who unlike the federal government did not throw up roadblocks. For one, there was the Alabama division of the USCV. Owen became commander-in-chief of the division in November, 1902, and won a second term in May, 1906. The Sons' first stated duty was charity, towards the greater public no less than the veterans. Their "second duty," Owen pointed out in the *Confederate Veteran*, was to gather historical materials "for an impartial history of the Confederate side." Despite the hard work of state archives and state historical societies, there were "literally a thousand gaps here and there in the [official] records which...if longer neglected, will be more difficult in the future to fill." Owen enjoined the Sons to look in "cedars chests...old trunks or secretaries," or any "out-of-the-way places" for historical papers, specifying wartime "books and manuscripts, both originally and contemporary," "reports, letters, addresses, and records...in pamphlet or book form or in the

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<sup>34</sup>Owen to Wright, July 15 and September 27, 1910, Owen's Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, ADAH); Owen to Wright, July 20, 1912, Correspondence, SG016705. Owen lived to see Ainsworth court-martialed for insubordination and pushed into early retirement, "Ainsworth To Be Courtmartialed," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 16, 1912; "Ainsworth's Retirement, Caused By Split In Army Circles, May Be Taken Up By Congress," *Birmingham News*, February 20, 1912. Scattered correspondence in Owen's Research, Montgomery Confederate Soldiers, and the Confederate Regimental History Files shows that Owen had some later, amicable dealings with Ainsworth's successors.

newspapers of the times,” and “private papers of the majority of officers.” Among the latter, there were “orders, general and special, reports of battles, rosters, descriptive lists.”<sup>35</sup>

Although he mentioned state archives departments in numerous addresses at USCV conventions, Owen never explicitly demanded that camps give originals or copies of materials to the ADAH. It would have been uncharacteristic of the director to have exploited a position of trust and authority in a volunteer organization in order to fulfill separate responsibilities to a state-supported department. As commander-in-chief, Owen stipulated that local museums should be the first repositories for collected material. If there were no suitable museums, then the Historian General---a position Owen filled after his two terms as division commander---should receive and where possible print Sons’ collections.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the ADAH had its own auxiliary museum. Also, no by-laws forbade the Historian General from copying materials. On the contrary, he could not only copy but publish as well. In roundabout ways, then, Owen used his leadership of the USCV to build up his archives.

Owen also could rely on the UDC. The organization’s Alabama chapters had been collecting and compiling records for years before Owen established the archives. With a link to the ADAH through his wife, the UDC ladies continued their work, filling out the archives’ holdings with donations such as “Miss Sallie Jones”’ compilation of records for all Wilcox County soldiers. The UDC formally congratulated Owen in the *Advertiser* the same day his second departmental column appeared, attesting that Alabama members frequently utilized the ADAH’s resources. For his part, Owen wanted the ladies’ chapter scrapbooks and other

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<sup>35</sup>“Montgomery, Cradle of Confederacy, Capitulates To Heroes Who Wore The Grey,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 13, 1902; “Owen Again Elected,” *North Alabamian*, May 3, 1906; “Collection of Historical Materials,” *Confederate Veteran* 23 (March, 1915): 130.

<sup>36</sup>“Collection of Historical Materials,” 130.

publications, both for their intrinsic value and for the rare wartime materials they might contain.<sup>37</sup>

Standard studies of Confederate memory-making reveal a moderate tug-of-war between white southern female memorial/heritage associations and the first professional, white southern male archivists and historians, over Lost Cause materials and histories. Both sides veered between admiring and mildly resenting each other's work. Gender added its own complications: heritage organization women sometimes viewed what the professional men did as dull, clinical, and occasionally heretical (the men would have said, "objective") towards the noble southern past, while professional men more often viewed what the heritage organization women did as romanticized, myopic, and one-sided (the women would have said, "honest"), and therefore a disservice to real southern history. These were both mischaracterizations, for the UDC strongly supported institutionally-based scientific history, while the archivists and historians, ever faithful to the Old South, secretly craved a little narrative color and vivacity too. On the most important points, the two camps were, as each well knew, in agreement. Apart from a handful of incidents---most infamously the Daughters' hounding of University of Florida professor Enoch Banks from his post for an article critical of antebellum slavery, and a similar assault on professor Herman Thorstenberg at Virginia's Roanoke College for assigning an allegedly anti-

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<sup>37</sup>"Department of Archives and History, No. 27," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 2, 1902; "United Daughters of the Confederacy," *ibid*, July 28, 1901; "Publications of the U.D.C.," *Confederate Veteran* 19 (1911): 302; Owen to Mrs. Robert Thornton, March 3, 1916, Historical Societies and Patriotic Groups, Record Group SG017881, AF-TO, ADAH.

Confederate textbook---the female amateurs and the male professionals papered over their differences and got along.<sup>38</sup>

Owen nonetheless made sure to be exactly courteous in his dealings with the UDC. He spoke at chapter meetings, loaned Daughters printed materials, and, as will be seen later, took their side in disputes over particularly sticky matters. Only once did Owen presume to tell the Alabama Daughters that they were doing things all wrong. In 1914, Owen got wind of a joint project between Elizabeth Bashinsky, the president of the Alabama division, and the UDC-run Confederate Museum in Richmond. According to the *Advertiser*, the Alabama Daughters learned that there were no records for their state's soldiers at the museum. At the suggestion of state treasurer John Purifoy, the Daughters were going to record surviving soldiers' service data and forward it to the museum. Based on a sample form and a bit of correspondence since lost, Owen believed that the Alabama Daughters also meant to send off original muster rolls.<sup>39</sup> He feared that the Confederate Museum, already principal southern repository for wartime artifacts, would become a sort of central Confederate Department of Archives and History as well, to the detriment of southern states' archival institutions.

Bashinsky's project might have been informed by an earlier one, the "U.D.C. Exchange Libraries." Mrs. J. Enders Robinson, Historian-General in Richmond, had come up with the idea in 1909. As Robinson outlined in a circular to Owen and several others, the Exchange Libraries, set up by local Daughters in cooperation with archivists, state librarians, and state historical societies, would preserve written Confederate materials. She envisioned "a Library in each

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<sup>38</sup>Brundage, *The Southern Past*; Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; James M. McPherson, *This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 104-5.

<sup>39</sup>Owen to Mrs. Lewis Sewall, November 11, 1914, Historical and Patriotic Societies, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH; *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 30, 1914.

[state] Division, [or a] Chapter where there is no Division,” with which “we will soon have a system unsurpassed for reference on Southern history.” It was important to set up the libraries in “safe buildings” such as “State Houses and Court Houses”; they “should never be in a private residence, even for a day.” Basically, Robinson would co-opt public storage to augment the limited physical spaces of chapter and state division headquarters. Fearing her plan might be ill-received if casually leaked, Robinson had enjoined her correspondents to secrecy: “You are requested...not to give out to newspapers or magazines any of this system until AFTER you have both adopted it and appointed your librarian...[C]onduct the work quietly, without SENSATIONAL ‘write-ups’ for the public press.”<sup>40</sup>

In an attached letter, Robinson had personally explained the system’s rationale to Owen, addressing, as she probably thought it, his possible objections:

1. Let every state preserve its own history.
2. This movement is not intended to antagonize or neutralize your splendid archive work...
3. The intention primarily is to centralize collection of Confederate writings for reference, secondarily to have them easily accessible by classification and index.
4. To have these libraries co-operate in every way, with archives and library collections...
6. That the Librarian, and Asst Librarian of said UDC Exchange

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<sup>40</sup>“General Circular No. 1,” Mrs. J. Enders Robinson to Owen, February 11, 1909, Historical and Patriotic Societies, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH.

Libraries shall be UDC [members]...in some chapter – because this large body of women can, and will do better work at less cost than could any others...These Daughters will find papers, where they would probably be forgotten, and finally destroyed as trash!

...It is my opinion that Southern Women should gather together the materials to be used by future masculine intellects...<sup>41</sup>

Owen neither responded to Robinson nor helped implement her plans, which she soon scrapped anyway. We can only imagine his misgivings, relating to Robinson's use of the word "libraries" for what were, by her description, more like library/archives. Owen would not have minded helping the Daughters save "Confederate writings," which could be narrowly construed as books, pamphlets, and other published materials. A system of centralization for "easy [access] by classification and index" was ideal, too. "Papers" that would otherwise "probably be forgotten, and finally destroyed as trash" were to Owen another matter entirely. That had to mean rare, unpublished materials---rightfully belonging to state-supported archives like his.<sup>42</sup>

Now, through Bashinsky's new plan, it seemed to Owen that the Alabama Daughters were similarly muscling in on the ADAH's turf. Owen quickly wrote to Mrs. Lewis Sewall, historian of the Daughters' Mobile chapter, telling her that "[the plan] has many difficulties and is sure to result in many errors and imperfections." First, "the blank which Mrs. Bashinsky is

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<sup>41</sup>Robinson to Owen, February 11, 1909, Historical and Patriotic Societies, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>42</sup>Before their professional self-segregation later in the twentieth century, librarians and archivists were often thought to be interchangeable custodians. See William F. Birdsall, "Archivists, Librarians, and Issues during the Pioneering Era of the American Archival Movement," *Journal of Library History* 14 (Fall 1979): 457- 479.

sending out...does not contemplate the record of any one company or regiment complete, but rather a series of individual records.” Use of the Confederate Museum’s form could create a blinding multitude of soldier portraits without unit backgrounds. How would that help pension commissioners, who needed company letters, officer names, and battalion or regimental numbers as proof of service? Second, the Daughters were transcribing incorrect unit designations even when they took the time to ascertain them. The sample form in Owen’s possession referenced the “Woodbury Rifles,” but after thirteen years of research Owen knew there was no such Alabama Confederate company. “In fact it should be Woodruff Rifles,” he offered by way of correction.<sup>43</sup>

Most importantly, the Alabama-Richmond project violated state archival integrity. The records in question came from Alabama. Owen’s ADAH had been created to hold them, and that was where they belonged, not in Virginia. “I would greatly regret,” Owen wrote, “to see any original rosters, that is, original manuscript rolls, pay rolls, descriptive lists, and other original documents, sent out of the state. These ought to be carefully copied, the copies published, and the originals placed in the collections...which the State has undertaken to preserve in this Department.”<sup>44</sup> Owen had loaned originals before, to the War Department and out-of-state patrons, only to lose some of them. He would not do that again, and he would shut down anyone else caught shipping Alabama papers out of Alabama.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Owen to Mrs. Lewis Sewall, November 11, 1914, Historical and Patriotic Societies, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH. Curiously, a few weeks earlier Owen had publicly supported Elizabeth Bashinsky’s plan, “Preservation Of Records Is Urged,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 31, 1914, the day after the paper printed a sample form with spaces for the information Owen said was missing. It could be that he received the form in an imperfect format.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>For several earlier cases of Owen lending archival materials, see p 158-160 and 160n.

It would be of interest to know how Sewall, Bashinsky, or the administration of the Confederate Museum reacted to Owen's letter. Regrettably we do not have their side of the story. Regardless, there was no falling out between the director and the Daughters.

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Owen's accession registers, although probably incomplete, indicate how much press releases and personal contacts with historical and heritage associations helped him build the ADAH's holdings of wartime records. The director received at least 66 separate items between April 1901 and July 1902. About one-third of total acquisitions for those eight months came in before column "No. 3" specified units short of records. The pace of accessions inexplicably slowed down for a time, then sped up over September, October, and especially November, when Owen received another third of the total. Alabamians sent in fewer items after column "No. 18" sounded the alarm in December.

Thirty-seven different people or organizations gave Owen materials during this brief start-up period. Two Alabama politicians, Governor William D. Jelks and Adjutant Office Clerk David W. McIver, made donations. More notably, several UDC members turned in papers to the ADAH, among them Marie E. Reece of the Raphael Semmes Chapter on two separate occasions.<sup>46</sup> Montgomery's Sophie Bibb Chapter sent originals and copies of rolls for a heavy artillery unit and the 8<sup>th</sup> Confederate Cavalry, a unique "national" regiment combining Mississippian and Alabamian companies. Annette Howard may have been a member of a post-bellum LMA based on her donation of rolls for four different units and a list of "war dead 'at

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<sup>46</sup>Reece had to ask Owen to return one of her donations when she learned that the veteran donor had never wanted it given away in the first place, Reece to Owen, February 21, 1902, Correspondence, AF-TO, ADAH.

Tuskegee and vicinity.” The absence of USCV donations does not necessarily mean that the organization ignored Owen’s requests either. Some of those listed might have been Sons giving independently, or men who the Sons put in contact with Owen (Appendix 2).

It is impossible to judge solely from the registers whether Owen had maximized available time and resources during his inaugural year. Considering how few Confederate records the state government had collected before 1901, any further acquisitions represented some kind of success. Although several potential donors never submitted materials, the possibility that Owen could have received more than he did is almost beside the point (Appendix 3). At the bare minimum, Owen had added several score muster rolls and rosters, and he knew at least a little more about a handful of Alabama companies and regiments than he had before.

In an ideal world Owen could have written a few newspaper columns, sat back, and waited contentedly for the public to come knocking at his door. His research trip to Washington, his brief collaboration with other southern state archivists, and his under-the-table correspondence with Wright in the War Department proved that he would wait for no one. His press broadcasts had been some help; it was time to deal with Alabamians one-on-one. The best contacts it seemed were those with the most at stake in the mission of the ADAH. As the registers indicated, most war materials were being donated by Confederate veterans anyway. Owen now would go after every old soldier he could reach by mail.

#### 4. Owen's Acquisitions, Part II: Records and Stories from the Old Men in Gray

From the beginning, the ADAH's stated mission to collect Confederate soldiers' service records was bound to depend on the contributions of the soldiers themselves. For them, Owen's department represented a secure place of deposit with state government support that lacked only materials. The veterans had accumulated information of the exact kind Owen sought; they lacked only a partner and advocate. Together the soldiers and the state archivist helped each other.

This state-soldier ideal of reciprocity was certainly not peculiar to Alabama. Other than a handful of Regular soldiers recruited directly by the United States and Confederate States governments, all combatants of 1861-1865 had been citizen-soldiers of their respective states. Civil War armies largely consisted of state-created clans officially loaned to Washington and Richmond. Undoubtedly many Union and Confederate soldiers developed nationalistic feelings during their service, as several scholars of the common soldier long have argued. Even so, when the survivors of Bull Run, Gettysburg, and Atlanta demobilized and returned home, they became state citizens once again in a single nation-state.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Notable studies discerning the development of strong nationalism amongst Civil War soldier include Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); André Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat*, and *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999 and 2012); Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2007); James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), and *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press 1993); Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). See also Lisa Laskin, "'The Army Is Not Near So Much Demoralized as the Country Is': Soldiers in the Army of Northern Virginia and the Confederate Home Front," 91-120, and Timothy J. Orr, "'A Viler Enemy in Our Rear': Pennsylvania Soldiers Confront the North's Antiwar Movement," 171-198, in Aaron

Later in life, veterans again looked to their states for acknowledgement, honor, and care. For ex-Confederates especially, state governments held the power to establish soldier homes, disburse pensions that Washington denied them, and assemble and make available military records. Moreover, veterans expected them to do these things. By the same token, the veterans had to assist the states in order to secure these benefits, mainly by proving that they were who they said they were. Unit war records, or certified testimonies where records were short, were the linchpin between the two parties. Northern state governments, having kept better records and rarely having suffered invasions, could depend more on their own informational resources. Southern state governments like Alabama's, burdened both by occupation and the loss of Confederate records after the fall of Richmond, desperately needed the help of their soldiers.

Owen first publicly appealed to the veterans in 1900 as a member of the Alabama History Commission. The commission, he stated, had an "exceedingly important" duty to report "on 'the records of the Alabama troops in all wars in which they have participated.'" Initial surveys of materials in the state adjutant general's office and the United States War Department showed that

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Sheehan-Dean, ed., *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2007). For arguments that nationalism quickly wore thin, especially for Confederate soldiers, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987); Mark A. Weitz, *A Higher Duty: Desertion Among Georgia Troops during the Civil War*, and *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000 and 2005); and David Williams, *Rich Man's War: Class, Caste, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), and *Plain Folk in a Rich Man's War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002). For emphases on the contingencies affecting soldiers' nationalist feelings, see Steven V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Kenneth Noe, *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2007); Jonathan Dean Sarris, *A Separate Civil War: Communities in Conflict in the Mountain South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); and Mark V. Wetherington, *Plain Folks' Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

much was missing. There were “amazing gaps” even in the voluminous *OR*, Owen announced, employing language similar to that of his USCV appeals. Owen desperately needed the veterans’ help to get the job done. Old soldiers with rosters or muster rolls, or “reports of engagements, or copies of orders, lists of casualties, or diaries or journals of campaigns or of camp life” must contact Owen at once. “No matter how apparently unimportant the paper or document, an account should be given,” he cautioned. “The survivors owe it to themselves and to the history of the most momentous struggle of all time to respond promptly to this appeal.” Perhaps half a dozen survivors responded almost immediately, informing Owen that they held muster rolls for six separate units.<sup>2</sup>

The *Montgomery Advertiser’s* columns discussed in chapter 3, as Owen anticipated, brought in more contacts and more donated records. Owen did not require much information to act. Once he had a roster or a single company’s muster roll---full or fragmentary, original or compiled---Owen knew a few names. Names were all that he needed to get more names. Generally Owen wrote to officers first, relying on their better rates of literacy and familiarity with other ranking men to open further doors. The higher ranking the officer, the more likely he was to possess some or all of his regiment’s papers. If Owen’s contact was a commissioned company officer, as was often the case, he was usually still a native and resident of the company’s county of origin. Assuming the majority of survivors had returned to their natal spots, a single contact in one county or town could locate all the other men of the unit. J. D. Camp of Blount County-raised Company K, 19<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, for example, alerted Owen to Aquila J. Ketchum, the company’s clerk, who besides having a “wonderfull [sic] memory”

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<sup>2</sup>“Alabama War Records,” *Confederate Veteran* 8 (January 1900): 40; Owen, ed., *Report of the Alabama History Commission*, 353.

also lived in Blount. Owen had a reply from Ketchum the following week. Less than a month after Camp's initial contact, the roll for Company K was in Owen's hands.<sup>3</sup>

An attentive lower-ranking man might sometimes initiate contact with Owen as well. Edward Y. McMorries, formerly a corporal in the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, got in touch with Owen after reading department column "No. 3." His curiosity piqued by its mention of a 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama, McMorries asked Owen whether the unit referred to was in the state militia or in Confederate service. Having served in the latter, McMorries pressed on Owen the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry's claim to have been the first state unit to join the Confederate Army. He probably gladdened Owen's heart by submitting at the same time fifteen sheets of service information on members of the John W. A. Samford Camp, UCV. Through McMorries, Owen met Colonel Isaac G. W. Steedman, who was helping McMorries gather service records for the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama. By the time McMorries died in 1906 he had given Owen not only additional company rolls but a regimental history that became a model of its kind for ADAH publications on individual units.<sup>4</sup>

Owen was fortunate whenever he met a veteran such as McMorries who was willing and able to exert himself getting in touch with other survivors. Captain Robert Emory Park was another such man. He carried out virtually all of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry's internal correspondence on behalf of the ADAH. At the beginning of their partnership, Owen had little more on the regiment than a roll for Company I and incomplete rolls for companies F and K. Undaunted, Park consulted with officers and enlisted men, wrote to fellow soldiers in distant

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<sup>3</sup>J. D. Camp to Owen, April 20, 1903, A. J. Ketchum to Owen, April 27, 1903, Confederate Regimental History Files (hereafter cited as CRHF), 19<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024897, ADAH; "Register of Donors, 1902-1903," 31, ADAH.

<sup>4</sup>E. Y. McMorries to Owen, September 4, 1901, I. G. W. Steedman to Owen, December 16, 1901, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment, SG024909, ADAH; "Register of Donors, 1901-1902," 22, ADAH; "Death of Prof. McMorries," *Prattville Progress*, May 4, 1906.

Alabama counties, and subcontracted historical sketches for companies A and C from a lieutenant and an orderly sergeant respectively. One 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama soldier gave Park nothing but the name of a lieutenant, but added that he had already sent the other officer a list of 73 soldiers' names with initials. Once Park wrote to the lieutenant he would receive full information on all of them. After more than two years of digging, Park submitted a mixed progress report to Owen. Two companies from northern Alabama had practically vanished, Park wrote, so far as the existing records were concerned; county clerks did not know the whereabouts of some of Park's fellow captains; every one of the regiment's field and staff had passed away; and there were no responses from living members of Company D. On the other hand, Park had some names and addresses to share: two officers from Company A, two more from Company C, several survivors from companies F and K, and the widows of the regiment's ranking officers. Park kept plugging away. Several years later Owen received from the captain's widow, Emily, compiled rolls for the rest of the regiment's companies.<sup>5</sup>

Park, who would later compose a history of his regiment for the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, was something of an outlier to be sure. Long diligent work did not guarantee an accurate final contribution. When the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry's chaplain, Cornelius M. Hutton, placed a full ten companies' rolls in Owen's hand at a UCV/USCV reunion in 1903 (including two rolls for Company C), Owen was pleased at first. Hutton's brother L. G. had worked on the rolls in 1864 up to his death in the Battle of Atlanta, leaving them to Cornelius, who had spent years perfecting them. Yet when he examined the rolls closely, Owen found them "incomplete,"

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<sup>5</sup>John R. Williams to Robert E. Park, June 2 and July 2, 1903, C. H. Herring to Park, August 20, 1903, Park to Owen, September 17, 1904, Emily H. Park to Owen, September 29, 1909, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024894, ADAH; "Register of Donors, 1909-1910," 1, ADAH. Park's job in the Georgia State Treasury Department probably afforded him the time and means to collect records for Owen.

although he did not explain to what degree. The search began for fuller information from other members of the regiment. At a rather late stage, Owen asked his father William for a list of all “surgeons, chaplains, quartermasters, sergeant-majors, quarter-master-sergeants, ordnance-sergeants, and color sergeants” he could remember. It is puzzling that Owen had not written down William Owen’s data years before. In the end, Owen obtained nothing better than an additional roll for Company A. He did however receive from Hutton and a couple associates a list of twenty-eight survivors of the regiment.<sup>6</sup>

Hutton initiated his collaboration with Owen, but usually Owen had to make all of the contacts himself. He corresponded with nine different men of the 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry for example. Several proved to be helpful, such as W. S. Brown, who contributed a roll for Company B; T. J. Walker, who sent in a Company G roll and a comprehensive list of regimental casualties; and Joshua Draper, who filled in the blanks on Company E. Company D member B. G. McClelen had no rolls, but he did possess a statistical summary of his company’s wartime attrition. J. F. McLaughlin sent Owen a fact-checked list of survivors. Other veterans of the 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama had less to offer. Sixty-three-year-old A. M. Bradford, stuck in Louisiana because of his work and desperate for money, offered Owen a rifle musket he had captured at the Battle of Second Manassas in exchange for Owen’s intercession with the Alabama Pensions bureau. Former orderly sergeant W. S. Newman knew neither the names nor whereabouts of any

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<sup>6</sup>C. M. Hutton to Owen, May 4, 1903 and September 28, 1905, Owen to N. A. Agee, February 23, 1904, C. C. Ellis to Owen, July 8, 1905, J. J. McMahon to Owen, August 15, 1905, Owen to William Owen, November 15, 1910, CRHF, 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024903, ADAH; “Register of Donors, 1909-1910,” n. p., ADAH.

survivors. Should Owen find any papers with his name on them, Newman asked, he wanted to know about it.<sup>7</sup>

Like Newman, some ex-Confederates had become a little forgetful with the passing years. Samuel Miller, formerly 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, could not recall the number of the cavalry unit he had joined after leaving it. Miller knew that J. R. Powell had been his colonel and William Seay his captain, but no more than that. He had only been in the cavalry for three weeks, Miller added. Owen quizzed Miller on whether he had been in Roddy's 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry. Miller was noncommittal, although according to the records Powell was actually a lieutenant colonel of the 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry. Knowledge of one's own company might not translate into knowledge of the other nine or the regiment's headquarters personnel either. Surgeon D. S. Patterson remembered names and birthplaces for other medical staff of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, but his mind had gone blank about non-commissioned officers in the field and staff. Captain Philip A. Brandon knew plenty about Company E of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama, which he had led. Brandon assembled a muster roll for Company E that Park regarded as a "souvenir of great interest and value." When it came to other companies of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama, however, Brandon admitted his helplessness. "I...saw four members of...company E" at a reunion, the captain told Park, "but [none] of [us] could remember the names of the 2 + 3 Lieuts of Capt

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<sup>7</sup>Owen to W. S. Brown, September 28, 1905, T. J. Walker to Owen, January 26, 1906, Joshua Draper to Owen, October 22, 1907, B. G. McClelen to Owen, June 18, 1908, J. F. McLaughlin to Owen, September 7, 1905, A. M. Bradford to Owen, August 1, 1903, W. S. Newman to Owen, November 1, 1906, CRHF, 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024893, ADAH.

Bibb's Co [G]." Of Company D, Brandon had one soldier's name, and without a known post office box, Brandon had no idea how Park could contact the man.<sup>8</sup>

The bulk of responses nonetheless were informative. Nearly every Alabama Confederate veteran contacted by Owen remembered something about his unit and fellow soldiers. J. A. Kennemer of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry at least knew his company's first and second captains and every lieutenant. "That is all I can recollect [sic]," Kennemer confessed. As to what had happened to the officers, "they was killed and scatered [sic] until I can't just recollect how." W. A. Moore of the same regiment could recall that his company had seven men left, with three guns amongst them, when it surrendered with Lee at Appomattox. Captain J. E. Gilbert of the 50<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry wrote down officers' names and mustering camps for his company, and volunteered to add non-commissioned officers at Owen's request. Francis Coffee regretted that he only knew one-quarter of the men of his company of the 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry Regiment, and for the most part their last names only. Owen suggested that Coffee write down the names that came to mind, set the list aside for a few days, and come back to it later. The rest of the men's names would probably come to Coffee at the second glance, he counseled, along with their initials.<sup>9</sup>

Owen's chief goal in writing the veterans was to secure originals, copies, or compiled revisions of rosters and muster rolls. This "structural data" was immeasurably important for

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<sup>8</sup>Owen to Samuel Miller, June 14, 1910, Miller to Owen, June 21, 1910, CRHF, 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH; Crute, *Units of the Confederate Army*, 11; D. S. Patterson to Park, n.d., P. A. Brandon to Park, November 8 and December 14, 1903, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH; Robert Emory Park, *Sketch of the Twelfth Alabama of Battle's Brigade, Rodes' Division, Early's Corps, of the Army of Northern Virginia* (Richmond: William Ellis Jones, 1906), 12.

<sup>9</sup>J. A. Kennemer to Park, September 30, 1903, W. A. Moore to Park, June 18, 1902, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH; J. E. Gilbert to Owen, February 9, 1911, CRHF, 50<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024908; Francis Coffee to Owen, June 20, 1910, Owen to Coffee, June 25, 1910, CRHF, 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry, SG024914, ADAH.

pension applications, for historical publications by the ADAH, and for Owen's intra-office registries. Requests for these materials amounted to almost one-third of all the letters Owen wrote in the sampled files.<sup>10</sup> Owen's letter to a surgeon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alabama Cavalry, with a few alterations, represents thousands of others:

The facts preserved in our official archives here concerning this command are meagre [sic], and I am particularly anxious to have your help in completing our record of the field and staff, as well as in assigning the letters to the various companies. We have what appears to be a full list of the colonels, lieutenant colonels, majors, and adjutants...but of the other officials the only name we have is yours. While we have the names of captains...we only have the company letters of two or three. If you could, therefore, at once let me have the names of all other members of the staff...as well as a list of the companies by company letter and local designation, if any...I would appreciate it very much.<sup>11</sup>

Most of Owen's requests specified this exact same information, over and over. That was intentional. The director knew firsthand that some Confederate units' nomenclature was slippery and their records haphazard. He knew moreover that a number of his correspondents were entering the years of senility. Therefore Owen gladly accepted multiple rolls and rosters in order to cross-reference them.

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<sup>10</sup>Daniel E. Cone, "Archiving Regiments: Thomas M. Owen and the Collection of Alabama's Confederate Records," *Alabama Review* 72 (July 2019): 218.

<sup>11</sup>Owen to Dr. H. P. Cochran, January 27, 1911, CRHF, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alabama Cavalry, SG024910, ADAH.

With a couple of later-war regiments, Owen kept receiving flawed or conflicting materials. There were original muster rolls for the 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment in the ADAH, Owen told Captain B. W. Bell, but no field and staff roster. Furthermore, Owen griped that “the rolls are mere lists of names, without historical memoranda.” Owen needed ranks to go with the names, county homes and commanders for the companies, brief summaries of comings and goings over the four years of the war. The 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama was a special case, having been fleshed out from two older battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama and 6<sup>th</sup> Alabama. It was not enough that veteran William Howell was writing a narrative sketch of the entire regiment. Owen also wanted to know “the occasion for the formation of the [original] battalion[s], by whom brought about, exact date and place of organization and muster, full list of the companies composing...by company letters, with full names of company officers.” Owen thanked a 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama veteran for enclosing a personal service record, but reprimanded him for not including a key detail: which of the two original battalions had included his company, G. Contradictory dates of muster came in from Private John Roberts, who believed that his company formed in 1862. Owen’s records showed 1861; “which is correct, and can you get it exact for us?” The command structure of the 35<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry also proved tricky to outline, as no two veterans agreed on the field and staff composition. Writing back and forth to several officers, Owen spent months comparing their rosters before the regimental chaplain could assure him, “I think we have the...adjutants correct now.” One officer position down, several more to go; Owen moved on to the 35<sup>th</sup>’s quartermaster, ordnance, and color sergeants.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Owen to B. W. Bell, June 6, 1904, Owen to William A. Handley, December 10, 1904, Owen to D. M. Richards, July 6, 1910, Owen to J. W. Brooks, July 6, 1910, Owen to John Roberts, February 25, 1911, CRHF, 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024899, ADAH; Owen to A. T. Goodloe, July 12 and December 16, 1910, A. T. Goodloe to Owen, October 13, 1910, Owen to S. S., November 3, 1910, CRHF, 35<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024903, ADAH.

State leaders eventually lent Owen a hand in compiling data on veterans. In the summer of 1907, probably on Owen's recommendation, the legislature mandated a census of ex-Confederate servicemen. Veterans had until August 9 to fill out and send in blank forms provided by their local tax assessor. Besides the usual personal information each man was supposed to write down his rank, company letter and regimental number, dates and places of muster and re-enlistment, promotions if any, rough data about service including any injuries or absences, and date, place, and nature of end of service (incapacitated, paroled, or surrendered). Efficient pension work was the main but not the only purpose of the census. As the *Gadsden Times* elaborated, "it will...enable and facilitate the preparation of sketches and the elaboration and correction of existing data...it will cause survivors to recall...stirring events" and "make them careful in regard to the details of those events." An added benefit of the census was its potential to "bring to light a large number of valuable original records." Alabama's probate courts would receive one copy of the returns, and the ADAH the other. Owen added a personal appeal urging soldiers to cooperate in newspapers such as the *Guntersville Democrat*.<sup>13</sup>

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Once he had the census results in hand, Owen fine-tuned his inquiries and cleared up misinformation. Knowing that M. G. Haynie had been in an unknown company of the 45<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, for example, Owen suggested some possibilities based on where Haynie lived. R. T. Edmundson likewise received a letter from Owen seeking clarification on his captain's initials: "You give [the name] as C. Grover Caldwell, while our records show that his first initial

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<sup>13</sup>*Form 14: Census or Enumeration of Confederate Soldiers Residing in Alabama, 1907*, "List of Administrative Publications," Memorandum Book No. 1 "Personal" - History, SG030088, AF-TO, ADAH; "May Take Census of Veterans," *Birmingham News*, July 13, 1907; "Veterans Census Will Be Taken By Hurst," *Gadsden Times*, September 30, 1907; "Census of Veterans," October 10, 1907; Finch, "Preserver."

was J. Which is correct?” Data for the first volunteers remained equally confusing. Mac A. Smith’s census returns specified Co. K of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Artillery Battalion as his unit, yet Smith’s description of his service sounded more like he had been in the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry. Upon contacting Smith, Owen found that he had indeed been an infantryman, the mistake owing to his company’s original self-designation, the John Gill Shorter Artillery.<sup>14</sup>

Confusion remained, however. Veterans were not above creative fiction for one thing. One ex-Confederate took advantage of the census to urge Owen to alter his service record. “I want to go down in history as A member of the 25<sup>th</sup> Ala Reg.,” Private Little Berry Burch declared. Owen’s records placing Burch in a company of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Alabama Infantry were in error, he claimed. “We were put in the 22<sup>d</sup> Ala by authority of the officials,” Burch told Owen, and “as I served so short A time in the 22...I cant feel right [being in the] history of that Company.” By contrast, John M. Mitchell was less than forthcoming about some details of his past. Briefly a member of the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Mitchell had left the regiment in December 1862 to join a Home Guards unit. Owen wrote Mitchell two letters asking for the name of Mitchell’s Home Guards captain, buttressing his request with a reassurance that he was only seeking raw information. The director received no response.<sup>15</sup> One might speculate that Mitchell’s silence owed to some embarrassment at having been a “stay-at-home ranger.”

Owen’s contacts likewise were quick to point out that the original unit records he and the War Department prized were hardly flawless. J. Q. Burton of the 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

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<sup>14</sup>Owen to M. G. Haynie, February 13, 1911, Owen to R. T. Edmundson, February 25, 1911, CRHF, 45<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024906, ADAH; Owen to Mac A. Smith, June 1 and 14, 1910, Smith to Owen, June 13, 1910, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry.

<sup>15</sup>L. B. Burch to Owen, July 10, 1909, CRHF, 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry; Robin Sterling, *Cullman County, Alabama Cemeteries Volume 3*, s. p., 1906, 208; Owen to John M. Mitchell, June 19 and September 9, 1910, CRHF, 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024903, ADAH.

hesitated to send the original muster rolls for his company to Owen because they were misleading. “Some of the names,” Burton informed Owen, “never did a days duty with the company being loaned from other companies of the regt.” That had happened fairly often during the war. As Burton explained, officers unabashedly fudged the lists “that the company might be mustered into service without further delay incident to [recruiting] the required number.” Burton had already sent Owen a marked-up copy of the original roll that was more accurate; he should use that one. Owen appreciated his concerns, he replied, but still requested that Burton send the original so that he could forward it to the War Department.<sup>16</sup>

Correspondence with the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry’s survivors disclosed a far greater organizational tangle, and illustrates both the difficulties Owen faced and the methods he used to eliminate chaos. The 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama had been formed in lower Alabama in July 1863 by adding two companies to the older, battle-seasoned 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Battalion (often referred to erroneously as the 5<sup>th</sup> battalion). Before that happened, the eight-company battalion had been broken up in Mississippi, its companies made temporary auxiliaries to the under-strength 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama infantry regiments in the spring of 1862. Dora H. Reed, the widow of 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama veteran George F. Reed, first informed Owen about the battalion’s orphan status in the two other regiments. S. R. Owen suggested that the battalion had been broken up because it had suffered heavy attrition. “We was killed out at [the Battle of] Shiloh [Tennessee] until we

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<sup>16</sup>J. Q. Burton to Owen, June 19, 1903, Owen to Burton, June 22, 1903, CRHF, 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024907, ADAH.

was few in number,” S. R. Owen claimed, “and [then] we were thrown into” the two Alabama regiments.<sup>17</sup>

J. H. Hagood further fleshed out S. R. Owen’s story. Robert Blount, the 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama Battalion’s commander, had rushed his ill-disciplined unit, still armed with muzzle-loading shotguns, into the fight at Shiloh against orders; “for this presumption, his command was taken from him.” Four of the battalion’s companies, Hagood continued, had gone to the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama, the other four to the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama. One captain of the battalion, Joshua Thomason, had refused to play along, going instead to Richmond where he was authorized to extract the battalion’s old companies and form the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama. John M. Stewart told Owen that the reorganization had been still more complex, with some battalion men also joining the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 38<sup>th</sup> Alabama infantry regiments for a time. Lieutenant J. F. Holliman simply stated that the battalion had been completely dismantled, the men distributed amongst various Alabama units, while “the officers [though] being free to go home” had stuck around in the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. Later the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry was formed and the old battalion’s men somehow became part of it.<sup>18</sup>

The compiled service records of Hagood, Holliman, and Stewart, available from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), show that they did serve in the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. All three were listed as members of the regiment’s original ten companies however, which begs the question of how the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama’s commander, Colonel Bush Jones,

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<sup>17</sup>Dora H. Reed to Owen, June 14, 1908, S. R. Owen to Owen, February 13, 1911, CRHF, 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024908, ADAH.

<sup>18</sup>J. H. Hagood to Owen, July 5, 1910, John M. Stewart to Owen, February 3, 1911, J. F. Holliman to Owen, February 18, 1911, CRHF, 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024908, ADAH. A sixth letter, Edward Crenshaw to Owen, February 18, 1911, gave the same general account. Making matters even more confusing, the 9<sup>th</sup> infantry battalion was sometimes known as the 5<sup>th</sup>, which was how most correspondents in the file referred to it. A different 5<sup>th</sup> infantry battalion served in Virginia at the same time, Crute, 6-7.

was able to extract and place them in his regiment without kicking up a well-documented ruckus with the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama's captains. It could be that these men were temporarily loaned, like J. Q. Burton's company of the 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama, to the other companies of the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama to inflate the rolls. One cannot know for certain. Meanwhile, John W. Inzer, lieutenant colonel of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama, disputed Holliman's claim that the 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama battalion's officers had bided their time until their old battalion was reconstituted. When the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama received the defunct battalion's companies, Inzer asserted, most of the officers had resigned---except for himself and a few others. Inzer further argued that the credit for getting the companies of the old 9<sup>th</sup> battalion back together was his, not Thomason's. Bush Jones had become the ranking officer of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama only due to Inzer's efforts. As for Thomason, the regiment had elected him major while he was still in Richmond, unaware that he had already died there.<sup>19</sup>

This was probably the first time Owen had heard of a unit being formed, then disassembled, then tacked onto other units, and then finally reassembled altogether again under a different name.<sup>20</sup> Brewer's *Alabama Record*, problematic in the case of several units, made no mention of the company transfers to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. Probing a bit, Owen managed to get a partial retraction from Stewart, who admitted that his inclusion of the 36<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 38<sup>th</sup> Alabama regiments as stepparents to the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama was probably in error. S. R. Owen also altered his story, claiming that the old battalion had been broken up not because of its casualties

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<sup>19</sup>Compiled Service Records (CSRs) for J. W. Inzer, J. H. Hagood, J. F. Holliman, and J. M. Stewart, 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry and 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Confederate Records, Civil War Service Records, Fold3.com, accessed February 17, 2020; John W. Inzer to Owen, July 12, 1910, CRHF, 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama, ADAH.

<sup>20</sup>An added complication was that Confederate law forbade oversized units; regiments with more than 10 companies had to shed the extra men as soon as possible. It is strange that both the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama infantry regiments were allowed to remain at 14-company size for a year. For one example of an extra-large regiment forcibly divided, see Cone, *Last to Join the Fight: The 66<sup>th</sup> Georgia Infantry* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2014), chapter 4.

but because it had failed to gain regimental strength by the time of the Shiloh Campaign.<sup>21</sup> The 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama's narrative sketch in the regimental files, as ultimately written, mentions the break-up and reformation, but the similar sketches of the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama remain silent about the addition of auxiliary companies. It was an Augean stable that even Owen could not quite clean up.<sup>22</sup>

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Anxious as he was to obtain structural data, Owen wanted intimate wartime writings or post-bellum reminiscences from his contacts as well.<sup>23</sup> He asked his father, for example, for “your recollections on the first year of the war...the state of public opinion in this state in January, 1861,” and “life...as a member of the Heavy Artillery.” When Owen found out that the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry's Captain Park had kept a diary while a prisoner-of-war, he thought of including it in an augmented edition of Park's regimental history, so that future historians of Civil War prison camps might draw upon it. Owen even invited Park to drop by his office to chat about his time as a prisoner and tell war stories. Later Owen encouraged Park to “include as much of dramatic incident as possible” if he wrote anything more about the regiment.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Owen to John M. Stewart, February 8, 1911, Stewart to Owen, February 20, 1911, Owen to S. R. Owen, February 15, 1911, S. R. Owen to Owen, February 21, 1911, CRHF, 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

<sup>22</sup>No letters in the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment's file support the story of the 58<sup>th</sup>'s veterans, CRHF, 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024896, ADAH. An undated clipping, Edgar W. Jones, “History of the 18<sup>th</sup> Ala. Infantry,” n. p., in the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment's file mentions in passing that the 18<sup>th</sup> got a “Company L” after Shiloh from “Blount's Battalion” (i.e., the 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry), led by Captain (later colonel of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama) Bush Jones. Unfortunately, the extra company's fate is never subsequently accounted for in the clipping, CRHF, 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024897, ADAH.

<sup>23</sup>More than once, Owen expressed irritation at Alabama Confederates' reluctance to send in detailed personal reminiscences of the war years, e.g., Owen to W. B. Frazer, March 1, 1911, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry.

<sup>24</sup>Owen to William Owen, October 22, 1907, Lectures, Travel, and Speeches, SG017880, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen to Park, June 21, 1905 and December 22, 1908, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

Several Owen correspondents excelled at “dramatic incident,” as it turned out. Park by then had already coaxed a couple dramatic or humorous responses from the regiment’s survivors. Private George Pierce Ware shared a brief remark he had made during a charge at the 1863 Battle of Chancellorsville that given the regiment’s hunger he didn’t mind being shot at by the Yankees provided they fired volleys of flapjacks---a remark that Ware said cracked his captain up so much that the man could barely stay on his feet. Company I’s O. C. Whitaker provided a lengthier recollection of the doomed Confederate assault against Fort Stedman outside Petersburg, Virginia, in the last few weeks of the war. Whitaker could still picture Confederate General John B. Gordon standing on a stump and telling the assault force, “if we would take [the fort] he would have our names in every paper in the South,” and that 50,000 reserve troops would follow the attackers to secure the capture. One cannot tell whether Whitaker supplied the number post-facto or whether Gordon actually spoke it at the time to boost his men’s morale. Either way, after deducting Gordon’s force there could not have been 50,000 men in the entire Confederate army at Petersburg and nearby Richmond. Captured and shuffled to the rear, Whitaker also remembered watching “thousands of [unengaged Yanks] playing ball...in camp [while] our poor boys [were] fighting and dying against tremendous odds in front.” More improbably he caught a glimpse of General Grant, President Abraham Lincoln, and Lincoln’s son Robert at a review.<sup>25</sup> Whitaker’s remembrances highlighted the superior Yankee numbers that in the Lost Cause narrative had spelled the Confederacy’s doom.

A few other men in the regiment eschewed the usual dry, data-heavy nature of letters to the archive, addressing instead the war’s turning points, the enemy, and the dwindling days of their elderly lives. J. H. Eason boasted that the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry and the Army of Northern

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<sup>25</sup>G. P. Ware to Park, June 4, 1903, O. C. Whitaker to Park, April 17, 1904, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

Virginia had suffered few defeats, except at Cedar Creek in 1864. He added that that “disastrous and ignominious” rout had only happened because of bad leadership decisions on the Confederate side. Eason, likely influenced by General Gordon’s questionable analysis of the battle in his memoirs, signaled out the midday halt allegedly ordered by Gordon’s superior, General Jubal Early, which had snatched away the Confederates’ initiative right on the cusp of victory. When Eason’s comrades dispersed to plunder the enemy’s camps, the tide had shifted. A late-afternoon counterattack led by Union General Philip Sheridan had finally driven the Confederates from the field pell-mell. Without specifically blaming Early, as Gordon did, Eason lamented that “if our beloved [General] Stonewall [Jackson] had been there, the enemy never would have been allowed to stop until he crossed the Potomac..., or if the gallant and dashing General Gordon, who was fast becoming a second Stonewall had been in command he too would have had them across [the river].”<sup>26</sup>

There was bitterness in John S. Porter’s letters towards those who had beaten his regiment at Cedar Creek. “The war is over,” Porter begrudgingly admitted, “and I can’t say that I love the Yankees, but I naturally love myself for hating them, I can’t help it.” O. C. Whitaker echoed J. H. Eason in rejecting postwar reconciliation, asserting that “like the rest of our boys [I] was never whipped by the yanks but got awful tired whipping them.” Although Whitaker had long since set aside the gun for the plow, and was busy “making corn and cotton to feed and clothe the rising generation that they may grow up to be strong men and women,” his mission to posterity remained militant. The corn-fed and cotton-clothed boys and girls of the South needed the strength Whitaker could give them “to be ready for the next war should it ever come but let

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<sup>26</sup>J. H. Eason to Park, June 4, 1903, CHRF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry; Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1903).

us hope it never will be.” Whitaker left unsaid whether in that hypothetical conflict his descendants would fight an overseas enemy, as Americans had recently done in Cuba and the Philippines, or one closer to home. Whitaker’s buddy Porter seemed to want to fight again, if his health would allow it. Mostly, though, he expected to cross over the river. “I am 72,” Porter wrote, “and weakness and old age tells me I shall not long be alive.” At the end of his time on earth, Porter would “always love & think of the happy days spent with the old Co F. 12<sup>th</sup> Ala., and wish to meet them in that bright, better, and upper world...deep down in my heart I love all the members of old Co F.”<sup>27</sup>

Owen ended up with an overabundance of details on the 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry (Partisan Rangers) by turning the research over to his part-time office assistant, Confederate veteran John W. DuBose. Owen first had wanted the regiment’s adjutant, David Bethune, to gather materials for the regiment’s history, but Bethune had warned Owen that it would not be easy. As a partisan cavalry unit, the 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama had moved farther and more frequently than the average infantry unit, often working in detachments rather than as a whole. In consequence, Bethune noted, “The companies were scattered from Mobile to Jacksonville and it will take a great deal of work to get up anything like a correct work of its operations as its field of labor extended from Morristown Tenn. to Mobile, and from Petersburg to Clarksville & Iuka [Mississippi].” The cavalryman also might have been put off by Owen’s inability to compensate him. DuBose, a former horse soldier himself, was only too eager to take up the reins from Bethune. Of added

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<sup>27</sup>John S. Porter to Park, November 17, 1903, O. C. Whitaker to Park, April 17, 1904, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

personal interest to DuBose was that his brother James had been killed in action leading a company of the regiment.<sup>28</sup>

DuBose quickly broadcast his intentions to the regiment's survivors with a circular. "Your regiment was second to none in the service," he offered them in praise. "The last man killed in battle in Wheeler's Cavalry...was a soldier of the 51<sup>st</sup>." Apparently DuBose had done some background reading in the *OR*, the *Confederate Veteran*, and the articles of Century Magazine's "Battles and Leaders" series, for his circular zeroed in on minor points of a specific encounter. DuBose wanted to know which of the regiment's companies had been captured at one section of the vedette line during a cavalry scrap near Shelbyville, Tennessee in June 1863. He especially wanted to know which companies fought the last part of that battle in the town itself. If Wheeler had done certain things during the fight---such as asking for volunteers for a last-ditch defense, or urging them to hold on until Wheeler's counterpart, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, had arrived---DuBose needed confirmation of those facts. The archives' assistant also sought minutiae. Assuming Wheeler had jumped his horse into the nearby Duck River to escape the fight at Shelbyville, DuBose asked, how high had the banks of the river been?<sup>29</sup> Never were Thomas Owen's letters of inquiry so tactically infinitesimal.

The troopers of the 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry were more than willing to share their thrilling war stories with DuBose. From Bethune, he learned about how his brother James had died, picking up along the way notes about the regiment's role in a reconnaissance for General

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<sup>28</sup>Owen to D. S. Bethune, May 5, 1903, Bethune to Owen, May 4 and July 8, 1903, Owen to Hon. John T. Morgan, September 4, 1906, D. S. Bethune to John W. DuBose, September 8, 1906, CRHF, 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry, SG024914, ADAH; Joseph G. Wardlaw, *Genealogy of the Witherspoon Family, With Some Account Of Other Families With Which It Is Connected* (Yorkville, SC.: Enquirer, 1910), 166.

<sup>29</sup>"Any Veteran of the 51st Alabama Cavalry, C.S.A.," September 19, 1906, CRHF, 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry, ADAH.

Wheeler. Further inquiries to Bethune produced lengthy narratives about running skirmishes in the 1864 Atlanta Campaign during which the regiment had helped trap and capture a Union cavalry column. Captain Nelson D. Johnson's letters to the ADAH numbered a dozen pages on average. He weaved his own experiences seamlessly into the Army of Tennessee's cavalry campaigns as a whole. A single follow-up question from DuBose about any part of Johnson's remembrances would bring a meticulous response. Johnson knew (or claimed to know) what each company of the 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry had done in any particular engagement, which soldiers had been killed or wounded, and what the results had been.<sup>30</sup> Johnson, Bethune, and most other men from the regiment were chattier with Confederate comrade DuBose than they were with Owen. As the files the regiment indicated, DuBose was passionate about the cavalry and skillful in getting cavalrymen to talk. Further proof of this is found in regimental histories with DuBose's handwriting tucked into the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Alabama cavalry files.<sup>31</sup>

The most detailed reminiscences that Owen personally received however came not from the veterans themselves but from the surviving families of Alabama Confederate officers. While investigating the muster rolls of the 50<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Owen came across the name of Lemuel G. Meade. Although Meade had been a captain in the 50<sup>th</sup> Alabama, Owen remembered seeing Meade's name on the roster of the 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry Battalion, as lieutenant colonel. Owen asked a soldier of Meade's company in the 50<sup>th</sup> Alabama whether Meade had later ended up in the battalion and got confirmation of the fact. About a month later, and perhaps after intervening correspondence, Owen received from Meade's daughter a pair of testimonials from

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<sup>30</sup>Bethune to DuBose, September 14 and 26, 1906, N. D. Johnson to DuBose, September 20 and October 3, 1906 and September 17, 1909, Johnson to Owen, June 16, 1903, Edna G. Farmer to Owen, December 19, 1910, CHRF, 51<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry, ADAH.

<sup>31</sup>CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry, SG024909, ADAH; CRHF, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alabama Cavalry, SG024910, ADAH.

two other members of Meade's company. Their format indicated that they had been put together as part of a pension application packet. Frank Sanders' testimonial stuck to the facts, stating that after fighting at Shiloh, Meade had resigned to join the battalion. L. W. Sloane's testimonial in contrast started with bare unit data but warmed up when it came to the battle. He wrote that "Capt. Meade, the brave, and gallant officer was ordered on to the senter [sic]...He stood there, unflinchingly and commanded his men, He and his men fought there that day, and taken the camps of enimey and eat there breakfast there. In the evening fowting, Capt. Meade and his men, with his Reg., Taken Gen. [Benjamin F. Prentiss] and five thousand men [as prisoners]."<sup>32</sup>

Jennie Jackson, widow of the 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry's Colonel James W. Jackson, donated her late husband's letters and gave Owen permission to publish them as long as he struck out Jackson's unkind remarks about a fellow soldier named Oliver. Jennie also contributed her own particularly dramatic and adoring eleven-page sketch of Jackson. Properly genealogical regarding herself and her late husband, Jennie described the colonel as "a strong secessionist," who became "illuminated" by news of Alabama's secession in February 1861. Jackson's neighbors in Lafayette County "were inquiring for a man" to raise a Confederate company when Jackson "thought of his boyhood days" and announced "'Why I can drill a company.'" Leading a company and later a regiment in the Army of Northern Virginia, Jackson fought bravely according to his widow but was plagued by bad health and resigned after the Battle of Gettysburg. The colonel's illness grew worse at his family's refugee home in Greenville, Georgia.

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<sup>32</sup>Owen to J. L. Smith, February 11, 1911, Smith to Owen, February 14, 1911, Owen to Mary Meade Gardiner, March 24, 1911 ("Statement of L. W. Sloane," "Statement of Frank M. Sanders," enclosures), CRHF, 26<sup>th</sup>/50<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024908, ADAH.

By the spring of 1865 Jackson was bed-ridden, his prognosis unfavorable. News of the approach of Wilson's Federal cavalry raiders, sweeping through Georgia after having gutted central Alabama, nonetheless spurred Jackson into action according to his proud wife. "There was so many rumors" about the Yankees' whereabouts that "he got up out of bed, doned [sic] his old uniform, & mounted his horse & went to see for certain...& saw them." Near death, Jackson rode to a cattle pen on the edge of town where his family kept some livestock, to be sure they were safe. Wilson's troopers meanwhile, informed that a Confederate officer was convalescing in Greenville, banged on doors demanding that the townspeople surrender him. They threatened to shoot Jackson's elderly father, eliciting an outcry from Jackson's blind mother. "He had done his duty in defense of his country," she appealed to the raiders' commander, "just what you have done; he cant do you any more harm for he has come home to die. Now if you have a mother pity me for her sake & dont harm my boy; wont you protect him for [my] sake?" The raiders backed off and left.

The next day, Jackson staggered back to the house, still alive despite the reports of the family's "faithful servants" that he had been captured and hanged. Wilson's men had taken Jackson's horse, but the officer reprimanded by Jackson's mother had released him on parole and carried him back part of the way on a wagon. Jackson's health continued to decline, and his death on July 1 was followed by the burial of Jackson's father the following Sunday. The last pages of Jennie's sketch honored her mother-in-law at length for persevering under a double portion of grief.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Jennie F. Jackson to Owen, July 16, 1902, "Sketch of the Life of Col. James W. Jackson of the 47<sup>th</sup> Ala. regiment," CRHF, 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH. Jennie Jackson's sketch, like many post-bellum reminiscences, must be read

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Most of the correspondents who wrote to Owen did not contribute exciting reminiscences about their war experiences or personal lives as did Jennie Jackson. Accounts such as hers are exceptions in the archive Owen assembled. For the most part ex-Confederates gave unit information only, hewing to Owen's prompts. Accounts of questionable content were rarer still. Owen the straight-laced southern gentleman and son of the Confederacy never advertised for scandalous or shameful tidbits; his stated duty was to collect statistical and structural information. For their part, soldiers and their surviving families when writing to Owen likewise cast a cloak of invisibility over some of the men of their units, as Jennie Jackson did when she asked Owen to delete any mention of Oliver.<sup>34</sup> They shuffled shirkers, scoundrels, cowards, and blackguards into a closet of unmentionables, where most remain hidden from view. Like Civil War veterans in other states, Alabama Confederates simply did not talk about certain things.<sup>35</sup>

Two startling exceptions in Owen's regimental files prove the rule. Submitting a muster roll for Company F, 40<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment, Captain Thomas Coleman drew Owen's attention to one name: "[It] shows that Semmes was a deserter. I send you a letter which

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with caution. Notably, her heroic depiction of her husband does not square with other accounts of his wartime career. See John Hoptak, "James Jackson's Civil War: The Story of a Confederate Colonel Accused of Cowardice at Gettysburg" – The Blog of Gettysburg National Military Park, October 9, 2014, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://npsgnmp.wordpress.com/2014/10/09/james-jacksons-civil-war-the-story-of-a-confederate-colonel-accused-of-cowardice-at-gettysburg-part-i/>.

<sup>34</sup>Owen never published Jackson's letters, thereby avoiding any mention of Oliver, or indeed Jackson himself.

<sup>35</sup>H. T. Malone, "Bell Irvin Wiley," in James I. Robertson, Jr., and Richard M. McMurry, eds., *Rank and File: Civil War Essays in Honor of Bell Irvin Wiley* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio, 1976), 8-9; Stephen Z. Starr, "The Grand Old Regiment," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 48 (Autumn, 1964): 21-31. The recent "dark turn" in Civil War historiography, enunciated by Yael A. Sternhell, "Revisionism Revisited? The Antiwar Turn in Civil War Scholarship," *Journal of Civil War History* 3 (June 2013): 239-256, and Brian Matthew Jordan, "The Future of Civil War History," *Emerging Civil War*, June 23, 2016, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2016/06/23/the-future-of-civil-war-history-brian-matthew-jordan/>, has among other topics brought moral outliers in and outside the military to the foreground, although Bell I. Wiley prefigured some of the shift with *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), chapters 5, 12, and 14.

acknowledges the fact, that the charge was withdrawn. This is done in justice to his family.”

George Ware wanted to see a different kind of justice done to Ben Blount, an allegedly sordid man conscripted into the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. Blount had joined his brother Andrew, posted to a different company, in the ranks just before the opening battles of the 1864 Overland Campaign in Virginia. Unlike Andrew, Ben Blount was in Ware’s estimation “a great talker” but “not so good a soldier or man.”<sup>36</sup>

From what Ware had heard, the draftee’s moral shortcomings were deep-rooted. Blount had been an itinerant preacher before the war, Ware told his comrade Captain Park, when he and two other church members caught a pair of the brethren in a multi-racial brothel. Ignoring his associates’ counsel to forgive and release the offenders, the sanctimonious Blount forced a confession before the entire congregation. Not long after, Blount demonstrated his hypocrisy when someone discovered him at the same establishment “after the same negro girl.” As a result, Blount was defrocked. After supposedly serving as an officer in another regiment, Blount had resigned and was corralled by the Conscription Bureau into the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama. Ware recounted Blount’s service as unexceptional. He was captured, possibly at the Battle of Spotsylvania, returned to the regiment briefly, then deserted. Back home, despite his reputation Blount finagled not only another preaching license but also a reputation as “a kinder [sic] one horse lawyer.” Some years later, Ware crossed paths with Blount again when Ware’s father-in-law went to court. Blount, subbing for the family’s original attorney, took the case. Blount of course had been practicing law illegally, and just before the trial opened he skipped town. Ware’s father-in-law lost the suit and Ware lost the last shreds of whatever respect, if any, he had

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<sup>36</sup>Thomas W. Coleman to Owen, April 24, 1902, CRHF, 40<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024904, ADAH; G. P. Ware to Park, April 23, 1904, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

had for Blount. “Sufficient to say he is dead now and has gone to reap his reward,” Ware summed up, “I hope he got forgiveness for his conduct.”<sup>37</sup>

Notably, the saga of Ben Blount has no analogue in the rest of the sampled regimental files of the ADAH. Besides his detestable personal life, he represented to Ware and other early-war volunteers a contemptible kind of soldier (the conscript) who entered the picture when the curtain was starting to come down on the Confederacy. Buried and gone to deserving obscurity, Blount could safely be damned and the reputation of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry and the Confederate Army kept spotless.

William Graves, also of the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama, was obnoxious in his own way according to memory. Graves’ CSR shows that he served faithfully in the regiment until early July 1863, when he deserted. That would have been bad enough in itself, but in the view of his comrades he brought dishonor on himself by crossing the lines and taking an oath of loyalty to the United States. Captain Park remembered that Graves was caught once before his successful escape, and that his aged father had come to the camp to beg piteously for clemency. Likely Park would have preferred to have had nothing to do with Graves after the war, but Graves had been an orderly for Company F and might be able to confirm the names of other men who had held the position. Park persuaded 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama veteran Benjamin F. O’Neal to get the information from Graves. O’Neal, holding his nose, deigned to drop in on the turncoat. In their necessarily brief conference, O’Neal mentioned four potential orderlies, then Graves “began to call the Roll but did not say anything more about [his] having been orderly.” Somehow Groves’ oral rehearsal turned the atmosphere chillier than normal. “The thought came into my mind that there was

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<sup>37</sup> Ware to Park, April 25, 1904, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

something wrong,” O’Neal later shared with Park, “but what it was I could not remember.” The simple fact was that O’Neal “could not fellowship him with the feeling of respect that I had for others.”<sup>38</sup> He must have left Graves’ presence in haste.

In the end, Blount’s and Graves’ stories demonstrate that almost always, Owen’s correspondents closed ranks and censored themselves. Occasionally, they also asked Owen to censor correspondence they donated. The honor of the regiment superseded the historian’s search for truth as well; Owen never sought out blemishes on their honor. The Confederate Army he preserved in his files was all but stainless.

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Owen and his regimental representatives carried most but not all the burden of gathering records. Group work could accomplish more than one or two veterans trying to do it all themselves, especially after the 1907 census demonstrated the effectiveness of mass, form-based communication. Six years prior, Edward McMorries and Isaac Steedman had created their own circular as the basis of McMorries’ regimental history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry. Each veteran was to “constitute himself a [historical] committee of one.” McMorries’ and Steedman’s instructions were more flexible and their wording more down-home than the census forms. Additionally, the emphasis was on other veterans’ services, not one’s own:

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<sup>38</sup>CSR for W. W. Graves, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Confederate Records, Civil War Service Records, Fold3.com; Park, *Sketch of the Twelfth Alabama*, 56-57; B. F. O’Neal to Park, July 17, 1903, CRHF, 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

1. If you can't recall the initials of a comrade's name, but remember the name by which he was generally called, give that; as for instance, Sam, Joe, Bill, etc.
2. Give the highest rank the comrade bore during the war.
3. If you have forgotten both the name and letter of the Company, give the name of the Captain or other officers.
4. If you have forgotten the exact date of enlistment of any comrade, give the season of the year, *i.e.*, Winter, Spring, Summer.
5. Give as nearly as you can the age of the comrade.
6. Fill out the blanks with the name of every member of your Company you can recall to memory, even if you have to be indefinite on some points...<sup>39</sup>

Where Owen could mobilize an entire UCV camp to gather records, the returns were greater still. Few camps worked as hard to help the ADAH as the Camp Robert E. Rodes group in Tuscaloosa. Prompted by Owen's departmental columns in the *Advertiser*, Camp Rodes formed a historical committee and sent out its own newspaper petitions. Papers and assistance were soon forthcoming. Hitherto hidden orderly books and pay roll accounts suddenly arrived at the camp's meeting place. Local Daughters dropped in to help the veterans decipher the contents. "At the cost of days of patent [sic] toil labor," Camp Rodes identified the companies to which the papers belonged and began compiling revised rolls. To be sure, the Tuscaloosa

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<sup>39</sup>"To Survivors of First Regiment Ala. Vols. C. S. A.," CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH. News of the circular first appeared in the April 2, 1902 issue of *Our Mountain Home*. The circular itself was reproduced in the May 15, 1902 issue of the *Citizen-Examiner*.

veterans had a long ways to go. Of the twenty-six infantry, four cavalry, and three artillery companies credited to their county, they had created records for only half, due to the state of the original papers. “Any one who has never attempted such work,” the committee remarked in an open letter to Owen, “can scarcely realize the immense amount of [work] required to make up a complete and correct transcript of these old books and papers---almost faded out in places, water soaked, mud-stained, with the wear and tear of years.” Still, the old soldiers and their young female assistants were proud to report that there were now complete rolls for twelve Alabama Confederate infantry companies and partial rolls for two companies each of infantry, cavalry, and artillery.<sup>40</sup>

Added to other donations by veterans, Camp Rodes’ work was a great help to Owen. Between April 1901 and March 1917, the ADAH received materials for fifty-three Alabama infantry units, eleven Alabama cavalry units, five Alabama artillery units, and five regular Confederate units that had included Alabama companies. The best measure of Owen’s acquisitions is not merely how many units were represented but what gaps were filled in. Whereas Captain Fowler’s collected records had nothing for infantry regiments numbered 55 to 59, Owen obtained muster rolls for one company of the 55<sup>th</sup> Alabama, one company of the 57<sup>th</sup> Alabama, two companies each of the 56<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 59<sup>th</sup> Alabama, and seven companies of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama. The previously undocumented 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 21<sup>st</sup> through 23<sup>rd</sup> Alabama infantry regiments now had sixteen company rolls on file between them. Due to the yeoman’s work of Captain Park, the 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry’s records were nearly complete. And nine

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<sup>40</sup>“Camp Rodes Has Done Good Work,” *Tuscaloosa News*, August 24, 1904. Perhaps the last war records donated to the ADAH during Owen’s tenure came from a UCV camp that had agreed in committee to divest itself of its papers, “Resolution from Raphael Semmes UCV Camp,” March 16, 1919, Lectures, Travel, and Speeches, AF-TO, ADAH.

cavalry regiments and battalions structurally invisible at the time of the Alabama Historical Commission had been organizationally put on the map.<sup>41</sup>

The few remaining “missing” units merit a closer look. Owen’s registries listed no donations for the 13<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, neither for the 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> or 54<sup>th</sup> Alabama infantry regiments. The 13<sup>th</sup> Alabama however already had complete rosters and rolls on file with the department. Four of the others had officer lists if not necessarily captain/company matches or county muster information. A comparison of organizational dates with the war’s timeline shows that the 29<sup>th</sup> through 35<sup>th</sup> Alabama infantry regiments began assembling at the time of the First Conscription Act in April, 1862. Conflicting authorities of national conscription officers and state officials, not to mention the lack of any record-keeping precedents for a nationwide draft, might explain why there were no donations for some of the latter units.<sup>42</sup>

Not all the material that Owen received from veterans is in the Confederate Regimental History Files (CRHFs) either. Rolls and rosters remained in containers in the Military Records Division of the ADAH. Letter collections from individual soldiers were put in separate record groups according to unit. Only a few unit records, along with secondary source citations and Owen’s correspondence with the veterans, ended up in the CHRFs, twenty of which were sampled for this study. Based on paper and font, quite a few items in the CRHFs are webpage printouts, photocopies, or typed manuscripts filed sometime after Owen’s administration. Eight files contain unit information reproduced from Brewer, the Perry & Smith directory, *Confederate Military History*, and the *OR*, cut-and-pasted on sheets, possibly by Owen. Six files contain

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<sup>41</sup>Registers of Gifts and Purchases of Books and Pamphlets, 1901-1978 (Access Restricted), ADAH.

<sup>42</sup>Crute, *Units of the Confederate Army*, 1-40.

typed copies of wartime letters, reports, and newspaper notices. The majority of files have typed rosters and company lists with blank spaces for officers' names and company letters. With most of the latter materials, successive versions with marginalia show that the blanks were gradually filled in later; the handwriting is not Owen's.<sup>43</sup> Post-1920 correspondence in the files, in short, indicates that up until the Second World War the ADAH was still trying to nail down some structural data about Alabama Confederate units.

Yet where paper quality, handwriting, and scribbled accession dates match our period, it is still possible to see what materials Owen filed. Eleven of the twenty CRHFs have handwritten lists of survivors by company, clearly scribbled down by Owen. Nine files have histories in pencil of some if not all companies, their leaves either in Owen's handwriting or with early twentieth century watermarks. Eleven files have regimental or brigade histories variously written by DuBose or George E. Brewer, a veteran of the 46<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry who, like DuBose, worked part-time for Owen. There are records on onion skin paper in the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama's file (a muster roll for Company I) and the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama's file (a chart of attrition from May 1861 to December 1864, inclusive). Owen filed a summary of assistant inspector general J. H. Pickens' service record in the 40<sup>th</sup> Alabama file in 1907, a handwritten copy of the sick list for Company B, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama in 1908, and transcriptions of wartime letters from 40<sup>th</sup> Alabama soldier Thomas M. Simmons to his wife in 1909. The director may have received and filed copies of Captain Park's *Sketch of the Twelfth Alabama* (1906) and T. F. Bostford's *Sketch of the 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama Regiment, Volunteers, C.S.A.* (1909) before his death. It is certain that Owen received

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<sup>43</sup>The writer's earlier suggestion in Cone, "Archiving Regiments," that Owen created and marked-up the typed lists may have been in error.

and filed the *Roll and History of Company C, Nineteenth Alabama Regiment* (1904) because he so informed the regiment's historical committee.<sup>44</sup>

For Owen to have collected full and complete records on every Alabama Confederate unit was impossible. No northern or southern state government has accomplished that heady goal for its Civil War soldiers to this day. Nor have present-day genealogical researchers, armed with instant communications technologies, closed all the “thousand,” “amazing” gaps in Alabama's war records that bedeviled Owen.<sup>45</sup> Yet Owen came close to completing his mission.

At the 1913 end-of-year board meeting, Owen reported that the War Department had a photostat copier and had promised to send copies of its records for Confederate Alabama to Montgomery. Soon Owen would have at hand “all of the rolls of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiments, all miscellaneous...commands, and [their] histories...as prepared on [index] cards.” Counting “the records...already collected by the [ADAH]” and the War Department's incoming Photostats, “I think it can be safely estimated that we will have at least ninety-five percent of the enrollment of Alabama troops.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Owen to Dr. R. S. Greene, October 12, 1904, CRHF, 19<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

<sup>45</sup>In some cases, new gaps seem to be opening. For instance, a muster roll for Company D, 20<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment on a genealogical website runs to 294 men, several of them clearly different spellings of the same name (e.g., a J. J. Gunthouse and a J. J. Gurthouse, a Beuel Horton and a Buel Horton). That infantry company is credited 204 men in a 1999 multi-volume roster of all Alabama units, but only 103 according to a slightly older published history of Bibb County, where it was organized. The website and the roster share 196 names, suggesting that the former borrowed some information from the latter. The smaller county history figure begs the question of whether its author listed only initial volunteers, or whether nearly 200 men from outside of Bibb County ended up in Company D. More than 150 years after regular military operations of the Civil War ceased, we still do not know exactly how many Alabamians served in this one Confederate company or who they all were; “20<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Co. D ‘Bibb Rangers,’” Bibb County ALGenWeb, accessed February 15, 2020, <http://www.algenweb.org/bibb/military/20thalcod.html>; Janet B. Hewett, ed., *Alabama Confederate Soldiers, 1861-1865*, Vol. III (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1999), 1115-11120; Rhoda Coleman Ellison, *Bibb County, Alabama: The First Hundred Years, 1818-1918* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 248-251.

<sup>46</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1913,” n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

By any standard, that was a great accomplishment. The names and services of tens of thousands of Alabama Confederates had been preserved for posterity, as Owen had sworn to do years before. The next step was to produce fitting histories for them.

## 5. “Grand Old Regiments”: Writing Histories of Alabama’s Confederate Units

The ADAH’s military service records project enjoyed great success. The documents Owen acquired for scores of Alabama Confederates’ units offered proofs that they had fought and led to corrections of errors in official and earlier compendiums. Significant as this was, to Owen it was only the beginning of a larger project. He maintained to the board of trustees that “While the official detailed records of the men composing the commands are of great importance, the history of the commands as organizations, and the part they played in the grandest armies in the world is likewise important.”<sup>1</sup> Owen ultimately wanted the rosters, rolls, and other papers he had gathered to serve as scaffolding for narrative histories of every unit the state had raised for the Confederacy. Along with the state’s *Official and Statistical Register*, narratives of Alabama regiments would demonstrate that the ADAH was doing what Alabamians expected it to do.

Regimental histories were prolific in Owen’s lifetime. The few publications during the war or immediately thereafter gave way by the 1880s to a flood of titles, reflecting the aging of veterans and their haste to get their stories in print, the evolving politics of the era, and sometimes the need for income.<sup>2</sup> Some authors worked alone, but veterans’ associations often established historical committees to assemble sources and appointed historians (usually fellow veterans) to weave the sources into stories. Collected rosters and muster rolls, augmented by information from secondary sources such as the *OR*, often dictated the narrative and appeared at

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<sup>1</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1902,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

<sup>2</sup>The first known, book-length Civil War regimental history was Augustus Woodbury’s *A Narrative of the Campaign of the First Rhode Island Regiment, In the Spring and Summer of 1861, Illustrated with a Portrait and Map* (Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1862).

the end. At their most rudimentary, regimental histories followed a formula. They recounted where units had come from, where they had gone, and what they had done. The larger half of regimental histories went no farther than this, amounting to libraries full of books that said roughly the same thing about the call to war and subsequent military activities. On this date, the typical regimental history recounted, we moved to this point, then on the next date we marched to that town, and on the following dates we fought these battles or skirmishes and lost this many men. Such bare-bones itineraries were often a stylistic choice, when not stemming from quantity and quality of sources or the confidence and competence of the historian. On the whole, regimental historians were under pressure to copy each other and stick to a standard form of names, dates, places, and numbers.<sup>3</sup>

A smaller number of Civil War regimental histories went beyond the rudiments. Regimentals such as *The Story of a Thousand* (1896), by 105<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry veteran and later celebrated novelist Albion Tourgée, included statistical social summaries of the men. Other regimentals, such as Frederick David Bidwell's *History of the Forty-Ninth New York Volunteers* (1916), appended collections of flowery, witty, or affective reminiscences to the collective unit sketch.<sup>4</sup> More than a few regimental histories included accounts of the formation and meetings of their veterans' associations and photographs or drawings of their regimental officers and army

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<sup>3</sup>Starr, "Grand Old Regiment." Civil War unit histories are generally referred to as regimental histories or "regimentals" even if the unit in question was not a full regiment. I have used the same terminology.

<sup>4</sup>Albion Tourgée, *The Story of a Thousand* (Buffalo: S. McGerald & Son, 1896); Frederick David Bidwell, *History of the Forty-Ninth New York Volunteers* (Albany: J. B. Lyon, 1916).

generals. The majority of regimental histories also touched on the war's causes, although those published from the mid- 1880s forward tended to treat the topic more gingerly.<sup>5</sup>

Just as with soldiers' letters to one another, there was a good deal of self-censorship in regimental histories. Historians portrayed misbehavior in the ranks as nothing worse than good-natured, harmless boyishness. Drunkards generally were objects of harmless amusement. Desertions and malingering usually were the fault of other units, the guilty mentioned obliquely when mentioned at all. Captain Robert Park's naming of 12<sup>th</sup> Alabama deserter Graves was uncommon in the regimental history genre. It is equally significant that Park did not tell his readers that Graves later donned Yankee blue. As for the late enemy, he could be twitted or satirized, but more commonly respected. There was little place in regimental histories for outright malice towards Johnny Reb or Billy Yank. The war had been over for decades and white Northerners and white Southerners had to some degree made up, or were at least tolerating one another within a larger culture of sometimes strained reunion. Horrible and hateful histories would be an embarrassment to veterans' progeny.<sup>6</sup>

Owen announced his regimental histories project in Bulletin No. 1 (1904) of the ADAH. He had been working behind the scenes for the preceding three years to gather original histories for one-tenth of Alabama's Confederate units and hoped more histories would be forthcoming. Owen intended that his department's projected history series should "present a full narrative of the entire operations of the particular command" by following a fairly conventional outline for

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<sup>5</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Salvatore G. Cilella, Jr., *Upton's Regulars: The 12th New York Infantry in the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), chapter 16; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*; Gannon, *The Won Cause*; Marten, *Sing Not War*; Starr, "Grand Old Regiment."

<sup>6</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, and Gannon, *The Won Cause*, contend that Gilded Age regimental histories may not have been as tolerant or accommodating of the other side as interpreted by previous scholars.

the genre. Ideally there should be a “(1) Brief account of the movements leading to organization; (2) Brief accounts of the formation of the...companies, and of their officers...(3) First field and staff, with brief sketches; (4) Equipment; incidents of first service, and *esprit de corps*,” and “(5) Brief accounts of the several battles in which engaged, sufficient to show generally the part played by the particular command therein, with special mention of deeds of daring, bravery, losses, etc.” Other topics worthy of secondary attention included “(6) Prison life and incidents; (7) Recruiting; (8) Camp incidents; (9) Subsistence; (10) Religious tone; (11) Numbers enlisted and casualties,” and “(12) Surrender and return home.” Group photographs and officer portraits would be included. Rosters and rolls would not, instead appearing in the ongoing federal-state service records publications.<sup>7</sup>

Happily for Owen and his regimental historians, the project was not starting from scratch. Brewer’s *Alabama War Record*, Perry & Smith’s Montgomery directory, the Alabama volume of *Confederate Military History*, and a few other published sources already included basic sketches. Regimental histories could also be found in post-bellum newspapers and a round number of books. Useful as the existing sketches were, they often contained many errors, especially those in the *Alabama War Record*. Before the ADAH could authorize new sketches, it had to have correct data. Accordingly, Owen posted some of the older sketches in full in the department’s *Advertiser* columns, asking knowledgeable readers to send in emendations.

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<sup>7</sup>*Bulletin No. 1*, 35-36. Although some Civil War regimentals were written by civilians, Owen preferred veterans for the job, saying, “There are many reasons why this is the desirable course. A sketch prepared by a participant will be more vivid and realistic, the details, the individual incidents, and the nice adjustment and relation of events will be more carefully preserved,” *Circular No. 6, Alabama Department of Archives and History - Compilation of Narrative Histories or Historical Sketches of Alabama Commands in the War Between the States, 1861-1865*, 2.

For his first post, Owen chose a well-documented unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. Column “No. 17” (November 29, 1901), subtitled “Alabama War Records,” included a sketch on the regiment drawn from Perry & Smith. As was common, the sketch wore its heart on its sleeve, tossing accolades like bouquets to the regiment’s survivors. “The First Alabama was composed of the best men of the State,” it asserted matter-of-factly, “men actuated solely by principal and patriotism.” Through marches and battles, advances and retreats---and a pair of surrenders at Island No. 10, Tennessee and Port Hudson, Louisiana---“the fame of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama [was] without stain; none can say aught against. It never faltered upon a battlefield, or failed to obey promptly and without murmur every order.” Any humiliations the regiment suffered were the fault of others, as for example at Island No. 10, where surrender stemmed from “general demoralization resulting from a badly organized army under incompetent commanders.”<sup>8</sup>

First Alabama veteran Edward McMorries had been in contact with Owen for several months before the appearance of “No. 17.” After reading the excerpt, he wrote to Owen the following January with a list of its inaccuracies. The 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama had participated in the bombardment of Union-held Fort Pickens at Pensacola, Florida, during two days in late November, 1861, not two non-consecutive days in the winter of 1861-1862 as the excerpt claimed. The regiment’s lieutenant colonel was re-elected in late 1862 after he had been released from prison, not before. There was no mention of a July 1864 skirmish near Marietta, Georgia during the Atlanta Campaign that took the life of the assistant surgeon. Contra the excerpt’s emphasis, the regiment’s role at the Battle of Peachtree Creek, Georgia had been minor. Finally,

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<sup>8</sup>“No. 17,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 29, 1901.

there was another omission of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama's assault on a Union Army fortified railroad post in northern Georgia in late 1864.<sup>9</sup>

McMorries' response displayed many veterans' preoccupation with meticulous detail, in this case befitting the doctorate he had earned years before. To Owen, that was the right mindset for a historian. He decided that it would be a good idea to tap McMorries to write a new history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama for the ADAH's files. Owen was not looking for a massive epic, just a brief historical sketch of 25 or so pages. In fact, the sketch would have to be brief because the department's publication budget was tiny. But even a brief sketch would demonstrate that the ADAH was fruitfully spending the little money it had been granted. Given enough time and product, the department might convince the legislature to pay for printing a bound volume or two of sketches for all Alabama Confederate units. To keep costs low in the meantime, however, regimental historians would have to cover their own expenses.<sup>10</sup>

The veteran initially expressed reluctance to take on the task. His post as principal of a school, McMorries told Owen, kept him busy most of the year. He needed his summer months free for relaxation and fall semester planning. For the sake of the regiment, he was willing to gather materials to start the work, but Owen would have to find someone else to complete it. McMorries knew from their regular correspondence that his historical committee partner, Colonel Steedman, was already on board with Owen. Hindsight suggests that he was probably trying not to seem overeager while secretly pleased to be his regiment's official historian. The

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<sup>9</sup>Edward Y. McMorries to Owen, January 25, 1902, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry.

<sup>10</sup>Owen to McMorries, February 15 and 19 and March 5 and 19, 1902, and February 19, 1903, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry.

evidence for McMorries' surreptitious enthusiasm is that by July 1902 he had turned in a 55-page manuscript, more than twice Owen's ideal length.<sup>11</sup>

In his rough draft McMorries drew on his notes and wartime letters to three Alabama newspapers, post-bellum clippings, personal papers, maps, and drawings loaned by Steedman, and a 100-page published history of the regiment's Company K by Lieutenant Daniel P. Smith. He also dropped into the ADAH at least once to obtain "dates and data." Fact-checking and revisions delayed publication until October, as Owen and Steedman compared McMorries' claims and statements with information from *Confederate Military History* and the *Southern Historical Society Papers*. McMorries then reviewed the proofs in late September--- conspicuously without reference to the *OR*, because he did not trust the Union Army's reports. Owen convinced the *Advertiser* to print the history unabridged, resulting in McMorries' extra-long "sketch" being spread out over five issues in October and November 1902. For the concluding installment Owen pulled Steedman's maps because of their poor resolution in newspaper print.<sup>12</sup>

The "Historical Sketch of the First Regiment Alabama Volunteers, C.S.A., 1861-1865" stuck to the highlights of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama's wartime journey. Initially assigned to watch the Yankees at Fort Pickens, the regiment was transferred to Island No. 10 on the upper Mississippi River Valley, and there in April 1862 came under siege, was captured, and soon imprisoned. After being exchanged, the regiment was reconfigured, filled out with new recruits, and assigned to the Port Hudson garrison on the lower Mississippi in late 1862. Another siege at Port Hudson,

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<sup>11</sup>McMorries to Owen, February 16 and July 10, 1902, Steedman to Owen, February 15, 1902, Owen to McMorries, July 28, 1902, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

<sup>12</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, October 26, 1902; McMorries to Owen, June 3, August 1, and September 21, 1902, Owen to McMorries, April 1, June 5, and November 21, 1902, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

longer and deadlier but with the same result, followed. The regiment laid down its arms a second time in July 1863. Immediately paroled by Union commanders, who did not want the burden of feeding them, the regiment recuperated in Alabama for almost a year before it fought the last campaigns. It went east in May 1864 to join the Confederate Army of Tennessee defending Atlanta, bled and died in the fruitless battles to hold that city, marched into Union-held Tennessee on John Bell Hood's quixotic mission of re-conquest, was slaughtered and routed at the battles of Franklin and Nashville, before what was left of the regiment shambled off to North Carolina to surrender for the third and final time.

McMorries throughout portrayed the war much as he and his comrades would have seen it. The 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama of the sketch had scant knowledge of either what the Confederate high command was thinking or what the Yankees were up to. On Island No. 10 the regiment stands guard in pitch-black darkness, seeing only the muzzle-flashes from Union gunboats that have cut off the island's garrison from support. In the trenches at Port Hudson it can barely discern the besieging Union infantry through thick underbrush and obstructive "slashings" of felled trees. Crouched in a ravine at the July 1864 Battle of Ezra Church, Georgia, slaughtered by rifle fire, it cannot see its supports or the opposing lines. Advancing on the Union force outside Franklin, it suddenly sees, when the fog lifts, that the Yankees have twice its numbers and strong fortifications. As with every other regiment in the ill-fated western Confederacy, something is always going wrong for the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama, and no one knows why.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>For general analyses of Confederate military defeats in the Western Theater, see Thomas L. Connelly, *Army of the Heartland: The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1862*, and *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967 and 1970); Larry J. Daniel, *Conquered: Why the Army of Tennessee Failed* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Andrew R. B. Haughton, *Training, Tactics and Leadership in the Army of Tennessee: Seeds of Failure* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Richard M. McMurry, *Two*

McMorries' best guess---hardened by the end of the sketch into a conviction---was that the high command purposefully sacrificed his regiment for some greater good. They stuck it on Island No. 10 to attract Union military attention, and it held out there until ringed in by 40,000 men. The regiment's defense of Port Hudson accomplished the same thing, keeping the exact same number of Union soldiers away from the contemporaneous siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi. To McMorries, the brave men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama were part of what nineteenth century military men called a "forlorn hope." Like Tennyson's Light Brigade, theirs was not to reason why or make reply. That conclusion left McMorries free to celebrate the regiment's miniature victories: an amphibious assault and rout of a Yankee camp outside Fort Pickens, the repulse of Yankee attacks at Port Hudson, and a brief penetration of the enemy lines at Franklin. It also liberated McMorries from the usual penchant amongst vanquished military memoirists to apportion blame or credit. McMorries maintained that Confederate generals William Mackall, Franklin Gardner, and John Bell Hood all made the best of bad situations at Island No. 10, Port Hudson, and Atlanta and Tennessee respectively, while implying that clumsy Union generals John Pope, Nathaniel Banks, William T. Sherman, and John Schofield had stumbled to victory in the same campaigns on the basis of bigger battalions and larger commissary wagons. This was classic Lost Cause doctrine at the regimental level.

Typical of the genre, McMorries' sketch privileges the experiential over the analytical. He pays attention to what soldiers ate, in quality and quantity. Food is plentiful at the start of the war, behind the lines, and surprisingly, in pro-southern neighborhoods in the Midwest during the regiment's time as prisoners. Inflation, shortages, and hoarding in the Confederate states on the

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*Great Rebel Armies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Steven Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990).

other hand scarcely appear. McMorries' sketch also conveys the sensory overload of combat, giving an idea of what it was like to be shot at, thankfully (in McMorries' case) without result. There is much attention to topography, as McMorries leads off with a tour of the islands, waterways, and fortifications of Pensacola Bay and later describes the folds of ground at Ezra Church as "gradual descent 100 yards; level 150 yards; gradual descent 100 yards; steep hill 20 yards; a slough, 20 yards wide; ascent of steep hill 20 yards; level to the enemy's position 25 yards." Among other particulars, McMorries lists in numerical order every Confederate outpost at Port Hudson and the names and total armaments of the Union ships that bombarded the garrison.<sup>14</sup>

On motivations, morale, and beliefs in the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama and the Confederacy however, McMorries was more reticent, requiring a close reading to get at his meaning. Slavery is in the shadows. "Most of these young men," he wrote about the regiment's original volunteers, "were from homes of wealth and culture" and were "inflamed with resentment against the North for long-continued aggressions upon the rights of the South." McMorries considered it none of his responsibility to plumb the "resentment" or specify either the "aggressions" or the violated "rights." His readers already knew what these vague phrases signified. For any who were uncertain, a subordinate clause in the above sentence---"as well as by the recent John Brown raid"---would have cleared things up. The North, if unchecked, would have stirred up servile insurrection and race war against slave-holding Southerners of McMorries' peer group as well the lower-class "'wool-hat' boys" of the regiment who had "*no property interests involved.*" McMorries' use of one of Northern anti-slavery activists' favorite phrases underlined what he

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<sup>14</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, November 23, 1902.

considered their sole guilt for starting the war: “All thinking classes in the South knew that the ‘irrepressible conflict’ had come and must be met.”<sup>15</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama definitely met it, in McMorries’ estimation. He stoutly maintained that of his Company C, “Not one...ever deserted, put a substitute in his place, or attempted to evade...service by exemption laws.” He suggested that muster rolls would demonstrate the same thing in the other nine companies. The Confederate Army as a whole kept on fighting “with a sublime faith in our cause akin to inspiration.” In spite of repeated defeats, McMorries and his grey-coat brethren “could not entertain for a moment the thought that our banner would go down in defeat.” For the soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama, suffering strengthened their commitment.<sup>16</sup>

Southern civilians’ morale, however, as McMorries recognized, was more contingent, contextual, and site-specific. White Southerners under constant Union military occupation, such as the Memphis, Tennessee women who festooned the men with praises and goodies on their return from POW Camp Butler, Illinois, were demonstrably unashamed of the Cause. Similarly, white Southerners in Union-controlled upper Louisiana were “intensely loyal to the South.” Unlike these people, white Southerners between the lines, such as the Middle Tennesseans McMorries encountered in late 1864, were sympathetic but reluctant to help because they feared persecution if the Confederates retreated. White Southerners in the burned-over Carolinas had given up hope by the time the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama arrived. In the anti-Confederate Mississippi Pine

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1902 (emphases mine). The phrase “irrepressible conflict” is generally identified with Northern Republican William H. Seward, “An Irrepressible Conflict,” in Kenneth M. Stamp, ed., *The Causes of the Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 105.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1902. For the antebellum origins and wartime sources of Confederates’ dogged belief in ultimate victory, see Jason Philips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). For the ways Confederates in the Army of Tennessee persevered, see Larry J. Daniel, *Soldering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Barrens, which McMorries and his comrades passed through after their Port Hudson parole, residents “would not even haul our sick a few miles without compensation.” The worst of the worst were white Southern men---“Union men not from patriotism, but for plunder and robbery”---who sniped at McMorries’ regiment during the 1864 Tennessee Campaign. McMorries took care not to emphasize southern anti-Confederate behavior, as that would have contradicted the Lost Cause tenet that *all* Southerners supported the Confederacy, but he did acknowledge that a few, villainous souls dissented from the Cause precisely because to his mind they were both few and villainous.<sup>17</sup>

McMorries likewise mentioned emancipation and African American armed resistance only to point up Yankee hypocrisy. While chatting with the victors of Island No. 10, McMorries discovered that “men and officers repelled as an insult the least insinuation that the war...involved the emancipation of slaves, declaring they would lay down their arms at once if they had the remotest apprehension that such was the cause.” McMorries did not doubt the Union soldiers’ sincerity “at the time,” but noted that “they did not make good this declaration upon the issue of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation nine months later.” Later, United States Colored Troops (USCT) units launched one of the assaults at Port Hudson against McMorries’ regiment and suffered horrendous casualties. Anxious to bury the dead of the black regiments, the Confederate officers asked General Banks for a truce. “General Banks replied that he had no dead there,” McMorries wrote.<sup>18</sup> What Lost Cause-minded person reading McMorries’ indirect

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., November 23 and 30, 1902. Stephen Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, assesses white southern civilians’ morale and behavior based on their location in one of three geographic zones (occupied towns, no-man’s land, and the Confederate frontier).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., November 2 and 9, 1902.

reference to white northern prejudice could doubt that white Southerners cared more for African-Americans than did their erstwhile liberators?

Crucially, the ADAH director liked McMorries' regimental history. Though lengthy, it was well-constructed, thorough, informative, and a joy to read. It said the right things. All in all, it could serve as a model for future regimental histories and historians if distributed widely. The best way to do that was to transfer the history to a better medium. Owen commissioned a bound departmental edition of the sketch, and he graciously volunteered to create an index. McMorries still had to foot most of the bill for printing the book under his own name---Owen did not have enough money---and to trust that sales would cover his expenses. He chose the Brown Printing Company of Montgomery for the job, probably on Owen's recommendation as the company handled most ADAH publications.<sup>19</sup>

The project went through the usual strains and snarls accompanying the birth of a book. There was a considerable kerfuffle when Brown demanded a significant deposit from McMorries before printing proofs, forcing Owen to personally intercede. McMorries crabbed about the company's attitude long after his history was a going concern, and he was not always happy with Owen's suggestions to substitute images, drop maps, or cut out chapter synopses which Owen considered "in very poor taste." Owen meanwhile thought that McMorries' attempts to contract with book sellers were a waste of time; he ought instead to market the book on his own through direct sales via mail at the end of each school day. Unaccustomed to the chore of author sales and no doubt exhausted from dealing with students, parents, and teachers, McMorries preferred

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<sup>19</sup>Owen to McMorries, May 10, June 28, and October 8, 1904, Hand-written contracts, n.d. and July 22, 1904, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

to let someone else handle it. In the end, both the author and the director put in the work and tried to drum up interest. McMorries ordered 1,000 author units, half in pamphlet form and half bound, sent about twenty-five as review copies to periodicals, and eventually managed to sell most of rest.<sup>20</sup>

It helped that Owen ordered about half that number under the department's banner head as ADAH Bulletin No. 2, and proudly distributed copies to a wide audience. Between October 1904 and June 1905, Owen mailed McMorries' history to 347 people and 28 institutions. Ninety-one recipients, or more than a quarter of the total, were AHS members. Forty-one had military rank, either Civil War veterans or in current service. Thirty-one college or university professors received the bulletin, including noted scholars Walter Fleming, James Franklin Jameson, George Petrie, and Ulrich Phillips. Twenty-eight copies went to survivors of the regiment, their friends, and relatives. Owen also mailed the bulletin to 23 politicians and 23 professionals, including John Trotwood Moore, the state librarian and archivist of Tennessee. Among institutions, the bulletin went to five historical associations, mostly Midwestern; five universities; seven university libraries; five Confederate Soldier homes; and the Library of Congress. Some contacts received more than one bulletin; Walter Fleming and the Indiana State Library both ended up with three copies each.<sup>21</sup>

With more space to stretch out, McMorries meanwhile bulked up the bound version of his history. The veteran historian now described the regiment's original uniform and company

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<sup>20</sup>Owen to McMorries, July 20, 1904, August 15 and 27, 1904, September 3, 13, and 24, 1904, and October 1, 1904, McMorries to Owen, July 15, 18, and 21, 1904, August 15, 1904, and September 15, 1904, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

<sup>21</sup>"Distribution of bulletins published by the Department and transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1904-1907," 21-27, Memorandum Book No. 1 "Personal" – History, SG030088, AF-TO, ADAH; McMorries to Owen, March 24, 1903, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

flags, spoke of gambling his first and only army wages in gold and silver, wistfully recalled grown men brought to tears in a Florida theater by a rendition of the Confederate song “Bonnie Blue Flag,” and moaned about a review in Pensacola that left soldiers prostrate with heat exhaustion. He bereaved individual deaths, relating how Private Langdolph Rump was stricken with disease at Pensacola, how a sniper drilled Private Newton Soles when he neglected to duck in the Port Hudson trenches, and how Lieutenant John Reeves was shot through the head while lying prone at Ezra Church. Too, there were now excerpts from sources shedding light on some of McMorries’ own questions. A letter from United States Navy admiral George Dewey identified a Union warship that McMorries had seen riddled and burning at Port Hudson. Another from an Illinois man explained that McMorries’ regiment had survived Camp Butler because the prison commissariat’s wife---the man’s mother---was pro-Confederate. Other insertions supported McMorries’ claims about southern loyalties. He juxtaposed southern Unionist Andrew Johnson’s conversion of Tennessee POWs at Camp Butler with an elderly Illinois Unionist’s failure to bring around the imprisoned Alabamians. Word pictures of aristocratic privates gladly manning wheelbarrows proved that the unequal southern social order had not marred military unit cohesion.

Paeans to certain individuals now appeared in the book form too. McMorries removed sidebars on two of the regiment’s captains so that he could tell the world how great was his colonel, Isaac George Washington Steedman. In good southern oratorical style, McMorries declared that Steedman “exhibited in a high degree all the qualities of an able commander.” Specifically, the colonel was “quick in movement, perception, decision, and expression” and “untiring in energy,” had “a mind ever on the alert but never confused,” and was “utterly fearless, but never reckless; delighting in the profession of arms; never, under any circumstances,

exhibiting the least irritation or temper; abstemious; modest; chaste in language...of pure irreproachable private character; and of a powerful personal magnetism.” McMorries also included Steedman’s recollections of imprisonment at Johnson’s Island, Ohio, from July 1863 to June 1865 as an illustration of his fortitude and leadership in a difficult environment. Added testimony from Steedman’s superiors propounded the idea that under a different set of circumstances he might had reached general rank.<sup>22</sup>

Another new chapter-long salute went to Alice Whiting Waterman. The Louisiana-born widow figured in the story of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama because after relocating to Madison, Wisconsin she tended the neglected cemetery section of Confederate POWs there. Waterman “expended of her means to beautify” the graves of 139 men, 110 of them from McMorries’ regiment, until her death in 1897. McMorries approvingly reprinted the report of a Washington UCV chapter, and within that report, an excerpt from the *Wisconsin State Journal*, praising Waterman. “She, herself, by the vicissitudes of fortune, had lost her entire means,” the UCV report noted, “but she continued to see after and care for the graves.” Waterman had done her part for the Cause, and now the veterans needed to man up and honor Waterman. Southern men “should hide our heads in shame if, after knowing the facts which we now know, we should fail to see to it that [a] monument be built with the names...not only of these men who lie buried...but the name also of this noble Southern women...who now sleeps with them, a heroine among heroes.”<sup>23</sup>

Having dispensed honorariums to white southern manhood and white southern womanhood, McMorries devoted the penultimate chapter to human interest stories, mostly his

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<sup>22</sup>Edward Y. McMorries, *Bulletin No. 2 - History of the First Regiment, Alabama Volunteer Infantry, C.S.A.* (Montgomery: Brown, 1904), 20.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 125, 127-128.

own. Twelve reminiscences, roughly chronological from Port Hudson to the winter of 1864-1865, positioned the author as the central character. McMorries recalled when the revolting miasma of beef-heads, offal, and maggots all floating together in a fetid army slaughter pen made him swear off “beef-head hash” (head cheese) for life. He shared his moral conundrum at whether or not to report a sentry caught sleeping while standing post---a capital offense--- which he resolved by shaking the sentry awake. He linked the story of Private “Mike” Brogan’s wounding at Port Hudson while following McMorries in a dash between the siege lines, with a later encounter with Brogan happily convalescing back in Alabama. And he remembered with pleasure a leisurely, luxurious furlough in the last few months of the war, availing himself of the generosity of white southern women and having his fortune read by a teenage girl. In the latter reminiscence, McMorries the character contradicted McMorries the historian with possible retrofitting. Seated around a campfire with other off-duty men, McMorries claimed to have “caused a sensation by saying: ‘I will express an opinion that you have never heard me utter before, because I have never entertained it before---but I believe our cause is lost!’” He would go on fighting of course, “while there is a Yankee vandal on Southern soil,” but “my fight henceforth will be with little hope.”<sup>24</sup>

McMorries was proud of his expanded work and opposed any further changes to it. Towards the end of his life he developed an uneasy sense that Owen might produce an unauthorized revision of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama’s history. He read in the July 2, 1905 issue of the *Advertiser* that the widow of a Confederate cavalry colonel had visited the ADAH “looking into the records of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama regiment of which she is preparing a supplement.” The woman earlier had asked McMorries to spotlight her relative who had served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama at the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 93, 115.

war's beginning. McMorries would not do so because "it would be the climax of impropriety and injustice that a few should have a 'write up' of their life, when hundreds of the Regt. just as brave, loyal & faithful must be left to...oblivion." Lest she deceive Owen by claiming that the veteran had approved the idea, McMorries laid out his "strong" opposition to "any 'supplement,' corrections, or additions to my brief sketch...I contend that a 'supplement' could be written only by myself, & with my consent." Anyone was welcome to write separate eulogies for their kinsmen, but no one could write a history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. McMorries had already done that.<sup>25</sup>

Owen responded quickly. "The article in question was not inspired by me," he told McMorries, for in fact his guest had not researched but instead had donated records. McMorries need not worry about his history, he added, for "Nothing will be done by way of additions or alterations without your approval and consent." And nothing ever was, although in fact Owen really did want to revise the book after all. Five years after McMorries' death, Owen contacted another member of the regiment about adding reminiscences for a new edition, but no additional material came in and the new edition died stillborn.<sup>26</sup>

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For another forthcoming ADAH history, relating to the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Owen approached a better-known ex-Confederate. Hilary Abner Herbert, formerly colonel of the regiment, enjoyed a sterling reputation in Alabama. He had served eight terms in Congress as a Democrat and one term as Secretary of the Navy under President Grover Cleveland. Herbert was

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<sup>25</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, July 2, 1905; McMorries to Owen, July 2, 1905, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry.

<sup>26</sup>Owen to McMorries, July 8, 1905, Owen to W. B. Frazer, March 1, 1911, CRHF, 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry.

also widely known for his essay in the stridently pro-southern compilation, *Why The Solid South? Or, Reconstruction and Its Results* (1890), which had appeared during the congressional debate over Henry Cabot Lodge's Force Bill. Like contributions from leaders of other southern states, Herbert's essay hewed to the Lost Cause interpretation of Reconstruction, portraying it as a colossally bad policy that had oppressed white Alabamians, duped Alabama's freedmen, and wrecked Alabama's economy. There was no need for the federal government to bring back those dark days, Herbert asserted. Alabama could manage its own affairs just fine, thank you.<sup>27</sup>

Owen thoroughly agreed with those sentiments, and often recommended *Why The Solid South?* in his ADAH correspondence on best reading lists. He thought Herbert a superb writer and scholar, and could not imagine that anyone else would write a better history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama than its former colonel. Owen's only concerns were the size and scope of the regimental history, for once Herbert started drafting it might be hard to stop him or keep him on target. Soliciting Herbert's help with the project, Owen thus set the basic parameters. The history should be about 3,000 words long "with mention of all heroic incidents, or individual facts which would add to the luster of our arms"---the standard structure, in other words.<sup>28</sup>

Herbert replied that he had a rough sketch already written in the midst of the fighting with input from the regiment's captains. The sketch covered events up to the May 1864 Battle of the Wilderness, in Virginia, where Herbert was wounded. Herbert told Owen he would not need much extra material to begin writing because the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama's officers had turned over meticulous records on the unit to state superintendent Captain Fowler just before the war ended.

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<sup>27</sup>Kevin Spann, "Hilary Abner Herbert," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, June 30, 2014, accessed February 23, 2020, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3602>.

<sup>28</sup>Owen to Hilary A. Herbert, March 30, 1903 and October 8, 1904, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH.

Thanks to Owen's departmental columns in the *Advertiser*, Herbert also knew that Owen possessed the records. All that Herbert needed from Owen, then, was a loan of the company rolls and a copy of a *Transactions* sketch on Wilcox's Brigade, the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama's parent organization. Actually the rolls were on loan to the War Department, but in an uncharacteristically magnanimous gesture, General Ainsworth released them to Herbert and the veteran got busy.<sup>29</sup>

When Herbert finished his rough draft, he returned the regiment's rolls to the ADAH in the summer of 1906, or at least he believed that he had. Owen promptly informed Herbert that there were only eight of the ten company rolls in Herbert's package. "Kindly look up the missing ones," Owen requested. Herbert, a bit surprised, searched his office but found nothing. "Is it possible that you may have made a mistake in checking them[?]" Herbert suggested. He allowed that if Owen did not have them they were probably at his home, which Herbert oddly had had "wired for protection" when his family went on vacation two weeks earlier. Herbert could not search his house until his family returned. Owen rechecked what he had and discovered that two of the eight rolls in his possession were "recapitulation sheets" instead of originals. Four rolls in fact were missing. Without alarm, Owen asked Herbert to look for them at his first opportunity. At some point the rolls did return to the ADAH, although there is no mention how in the director's correspondence.<sup>30</sup> Owen's loan of manuscript materials to Herbert

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<sup>29</sup>Herbert to Owen, April 6, 1903, January 12 and October 10, 1905, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry; "The 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama," *Atmore Record*, May 18, 1905.

<sup>30</sup>Owen to Herbert, June 23, July 6, and November 1, 1906, Herbert to Owen, June 30 and July 9, 1906, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry.

and calm response to their being misplaced indicate both trust in Herbert and a flexible attitude towards archival security that would make a present-day archivist blanch.<sup>31</sup>

Flexibility also characterized Owen's response to Herbert's narrative plans. The veteran historian aimed to do more than recapitulate the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry's experiences, he planned to justify its cause. He wanted to explain why the regiment had formed in the first place and why men had joined it. Herbert expressed interest in the social and political reasons for Confederate enlistment, a fitting concern considering his career and writings. To do so, he insisted on beginning his history with what he saw as the cause of the war, the birth of the Northern abolition movement.

Long interested in this topic, Herbert had two years prior written a reminiscence of how he had regarded abolitionism in his youth. When he revisited the reminiscence, Herbert found it shallow. "A little reflection," Herbert admitted to Owen, "convinced me of the utter futility of such an attempt on my part to portray the history of a crusade which had its origin prior to my birth, and of the progress of which I could have no correct idea from my general reading." Returning from a summer vacation, Herbert retreated to his study and dove into recent histories of abolition and the antebellum era. After a prolonged reading spell, "I rewrote that chapter carefully, basing my statements mainly on the most reliable histories...as written by the standard...authorities." Without the introductory chapter on abolition, Herbert doubted that his regimental history would be any good. "I am willing to stand on [it] as history," he told Owen,

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<sup>31</sup>Perhaps due to Owen's trusting nature, a "representative" from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill borrowed Governor Braxton Bragg Comer's correspondence in 1911 and never returned it. The materials ended up in the university's Southern Historical Collection, C. M. Stanley, "Alabama's Loss of Historic Treasures," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 13, 1963.

“inasmuch as my conclusion...is that the abolition crusade was the direct cause of antagonism”---and war---“between the two sections.”<sup>32</sup>

Owen did his best to dissuade Herbert from this potentially dicey narrative path, although not with much effort. He told Herbert that there was no need for a long digression on the war’s causes; regimental histories were supposed to be about *regiments*. Political surveys belonged in other publications, he added, such as the AHS *Transactions* series, where Owen would gladly publish Herbert’s introductory chapter. If Owen really preferred a depoliticized regimental history from Herbert however, he did not put his foot down. Herbert therefore concluded the matter was a *fait accompli*, informing Owen that the introductory chapter would take up the first eight to ten pages of his history “as accounting for the wonderful enthusiasm with which the new Confederacy was greeted in the South” and in order to “make this little work of mine interesting and readable.” He gave Owen no explicit authority to cut out the chapter in the interest of length or propriety.<sup>33</sup> Rather than flex his implicit editorial powers, Owen kept the undesired material. Whatever Herbert wanted printed, he would press on the *Advertiser* to use.

Within a few months, Herbert delivered a 3,000-word history of “heroic incidents” and “individual facts” and then some. His “History of the Eighth Alabama Volunteer Infantry Regt., C.S.A.” took up eight *Advertiser* issues in 1905. Unlike McMorries’ newspaper version, Herbert’s was all text. The greater length came from the deeper well of sources Herbert drew on to tell his regiment’s story. Besides the *OR*---which McMorries had avoided like the plague---and Fowler’s regimental records, Herbert tapped a literary superstructure for the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama that

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<sup>32</sup>Herbert to Owen, May 11, 1905, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH. In an undated letter to Owen, Herbert added, “I am unwilling that my descendants shall misunderstand the motives and purposes underlying secession and the civil war.”

<sup>33</sup>Owen to Herbert, May 16, 1905, Herbert to Owen, September 22, 1905, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

McMorries could never match. The 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry had served in the Eastern Theater of the war (principally Virginia, plus the Atlantic seaboard, Maryland, and Pennsylvania), where a larger, longer-settled population, better literacy rates, a higher level of urbanization, a greater number of newspapers and publishing companies, and a better history of record-keeping meant there were simply more written materials available. In addition, the mere 100 miles separating the contending capitals of Richmond and Washington tinged every campaign in that theater with political gravitas and plenty of political commentary. The exploits and odds-defying victories of Confederate Generals Lee and “Stonewall” Jackson at the head of the Army of Northern Virginia likewise had been told and retold during and after the war. Northerners and Southerners, civilians and soldiers alike, left more records from the Eastern Theater than could be read in a thousand lifetimes.<sup>34</sup>

Within the Army of Northern Virginia, moreover, the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama was better documented than many others. It had been in a brigade commanded after October 1861 by Brigadier General Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox.<sup>35</sup> Wilcox’s Brigade---as it was known even after Wilcox’s promotion to divisional leadership after Gettysburg---had turned over complete rosters and rolls to Captain Fowler, relieving Owen from having to track down papers for its constituent parts. Because Wilcox’s five Alabama regiments stayed together all the way to Appomattox, there were also fewer confusing organizational changes for Herbert to keep track, especially compared to the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama, which had jumped through several brigades.

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<sup>34</sup>For the Eastern Theater’s predominance in Civil War historiography see McMurry, *Two Great Rebel Armies*, and *The Fourth Battle of Winchester: Towards a New Civil War Paradigm* (Kent State University Press, 1989); and Connelly, *Army of the Heartland*, chapter 1.

<sup>35</sup> Five regiments served in the brigade, the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama, 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama, 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama, 11<sup>th</sup> Alabama, and 14<sup>th</sup> Alabama.

To hear Herbert tell it however, excellent structural documentation had not translated into deserved fame. Like so many contemporary veteran-authors, Herbert fumed that other officers and regiments claimed glory that he believed he and his comrades deserved.<sup>36</sup> The first issue of his history lodged a complaint against the authorities, both Union and Confederate, for not giving the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama and Wilcox's Brigade credit where credit was due. Herbert especially was put out of sorts by histories and markers of the May 1863 Battle of Salem Church, where Wilcox's Brigade had halted an attack on Lee's rear in the Chancellorsville Campaign, that "stat[ed] that the battle was won by General Early, when Early had nothing to do with it, he and his command being some five miles away." In the same way, popular accounts of the July 1864 Battle of the Crater at Petersburg slighted the Alabamians' decisive part in that Confederate victory. "Some of the survivors of [General William] Mahone's old [Virginia] brigade [are] making the claim" that they captured the Crater, Herbert grumped, but in fact, "Wilcox's Brigade captured the Crater proper and Mahone's only captured the works to the left of it."<sup>37</sup> Herbert disavowed any desire to rain on other ex-Confederates' parades. He only wanted to show that the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama and its sister regiments had a lot to be proud of.

Pride in the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama came from knowledge of what it had endured, and Herbert displayed a solid understanding of the regiment's battles and campaigns. All through his narrative, he explained, usually *in media res*, the overall situation, the general movements of the Army of Northern Virginia and its Union military opponent, the Army of the Potomac, and the plans of Lee and the Yankee generals so far as he knew them. Apart from the supposed omniscience the *OR* offered, Herbert had been a colonel and therefore had sat on a higher

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<sup>36</sup>On this phenomenon, see Kenneth W. Noe, "'Damned North Carolinians' and 'Brave Virginians': The Lane-Mahone Controversy, Honor, and Civil War Memory." *Journal of Military History* 72 (October 2008): 1089-1115.

<sup>37</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, July 22, 1906.

observatory perch than the corporal historian of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama. The terrain too had generally been more open in the Eastern Theater than in the Western. That meant that in many cases Herbert, unlike McMorries, had actually seen the enemy, as at the August 1862 Battle of Second Bull Run. He wrote, “Far as the eye could reach, spread out over that vast plain composed of a succession of plateaus, were martialled [sic] the enemy’s blue lines, interrupted here and there by the artillery with their red caps. Sometimes there were three lines of infantry with intervals between. Along the serried columns bayonets were gleaming...and everywhere...banners were waving.”<sup>38</sup>

Engagements such as Second Bull Run were Herbert’s meat and drink as a historian. The 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama had easily fought three, perhaps four times as many battles and skirmishes as the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama, and most of the battles had taken place in a small corridor of land. Herbert therefore let the clash of arms dictate his narrative. He dropped entire columns of after-action reports from the *OR* and newspapers into the story at spots where he had been absent or his memories were patchy. That this heavy martial emphasis squeezed out more than a smattering of human interest material did not seem to bother Herbert, no more than it bothered other Confederate memoirists. His regimental history---so unlike McMorries’---made the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama a group of soldiers first and foremost, a group of interesting people second.

Of the many combats the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama experienced, three stood out to Herbert: Salem Church, Gettysburg, and the Petersburg Crater. For each, Herbert called wartime writings, post-bellum battlefield visits, and letters from contemporary Federal authors as witnesses that his regiment and Wilcox’s Brigade had gone beyond the call of duty. Its bold stand against “30,000

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., August 12, 1906.

fresh troops” (a verified rather than inflated number) at Salem Church had been “so important,” in the opinion of another Confederate memoirist, “that had it not been [made, there] might have been disast[er] to our arms.” Its attack on the Union right-center at Gettysburg had broken the lines and would have won the battle, Herbert testified, if other brigades had hustled to its support. And its charge into the “Crater,” a gaping pit opened in the Confederate trenches at Petersburg by the explosion of a Union gunpowder mine tunnel, was a breathtaking deed, related almost minute-by-minute in the longest single section of Herbert’s history. Herbert told his story of the Crater, then let several other Alabamians tell it again so as to give “the strongest possible evidence of the truthfulness of...two witnesses who give their testimony independently.” Had the Alabamians faltered that day, Herbert believed, Grant’s army would have grabbed Petersburg and closed the war by nightfall.<sup>39</sup>

Herbert also knew where his men came from as well as what they had accomplished. Whenever he mentioned a soldier of the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama, Herbert nearly always gave the man’s company letter and sometimes his home county---something that McMorries hardly ever did. Herbert was particularly consistent recounting the regiment’s casualties, by number and (where known) by name. He provided lists of men placed on the “Roll of Honor” for exemplary conduct in each major battle. On the other hand, Herbert did not describe in detail the deaths of soldiers he saw slain with his own eyes, as McMorries had done. Nor did Herbert pay much attention to what went on behind the front lines. His history contains only a couple encounters with Confederate civilians, and does not measure variations in popular support or morale, slight

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., August 19 and September 2, 1906. Herbert’s account of the Crater, in which USCT regiments fought and suffered severe casualties, also included a vignette of a mortally wounded black soldier pronouncing poetic justice on a fatally stricken white Union officer who had earlier shot the man’s brother for cowardice: “‘Thank God. You killed my brother when we charged, because he was afraid and ran. Now the rebels have killed you.’ Death soon ended the suffering of one and the hatred of the other,” September 2.

though these might have been in staunchly pro-Confederate central Virginia where his regiment mostly fought.

As regards morale in the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama, Herbert revealed that by early 1864 he and his men had practically accepted that the Cause was very likely lost. Their grins at Virginia women at a winter dance could not hide their apprehensions about the next campaign or their gloomy view of the future. He remembered:

We knew the situation... We knew too that the blockade was shutting us in, that with us recruiting was practically at an end, that the North was increasing its vastly superior armies from both natives and foreigners, and that we alone must stand between these armies and [Richmond]. And yet, sensible as we were of the dangers that confronted us, the days flew by, with many of us at least, as merrily as any we can count in all the checkered calendar of the past. Possibly a dance was all the merrier because of the feeling that it might be the last---the dance of death.<sup>40</sup>

Herbert's quoting of Lost Cause dogma---the North's overwhelming levies and materiel, the South's dwindling resources, the denial of foreign recognition, the cruel hand of fate---did not preclude recognition that terrain, institutions, and strategic choices had shaped the war's outcome too. He considered the United States Navy the most powerful part of the Union war effort and proposed the unusual idea that the South's myriad waterways had been almost

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., September 2, 1906.

preternatural gifts to the Union's war aims. "Like the serpent of classical fable that strangled Laocoon," Herbert lamented, "so the United States Navy had, by penetrating our rivers, deprived our armies of the power to help each other." It was the navy, Herbert continued, "that captured Memphis, Island No. 10, New Orleans...compassed the downfall of Vicksburg, cut off Confederate communications across the Mississippi, and burned our depots of supplies."<sup>41</sup> Had he lived to read it, Edward McMorries could have taken some comfort in Herbert's argument that southern geography and Union naval power explained why the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry kept getting captured.

What really set Herbert's regimental history apart from McMorries', however, was its introductory chapter. Herbert explained that Alabamians in 1861 were "exulting" in their new Confederacy and ready to fight for it because they had come to hate the old Union---and the abolitionists had made them hate it. Herbert characterized the Northern abolition movement as a kind of infidel religious frenzy, the "offspring of a union between philanthropy and outlawry." Abolitionists, Herbert declared, had been deaf to reason, blind to practical difficulties, and opposed to moderation, careful planning, or long-term thinking. Like medieval crusaders or the Protestant reformers, they had refused to leave regular people alone, loudly trumpeting their insane creed that southern slavery was a monstrous evil, everyone was guilty of aiding and abetting it, and it had to be shut down by immediate, uncompensated emancipation. Anticipating the soon-to-emerge "blundering generation" interpretation of the war, enunciated by some northern and southern scholars, Herbert argued that repeated abolitionist agitation had turned otherwise right-thinking Northerners and Southerners against each other. According to this interpretation, if anyone on either side of the Mason-Dixon Line had stopped to think for a

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., September 16, 1906.

moment, they would have realized the abolitionists were deliberately stirring up trouble, and there would have been no bloodshed.<sup>42</sup>

Herbert also stressed that the abolition “crusade” had not fallen out of the skies. The antebellum world had been slowly divesting itself of unfree labor, and Great Britain most notably had abolished slavery in its empire in 1833. Northern states had gradually emancipated their slaves because their climate and economies made the institution impractical. There was therefore a strong global basis for believing that the end of slavery was drawing near. Nowhere had this belief been stronger, Herbert declared, than in the early antebellum South. Although on the one hand southern slavery “had become the bed-rock of social and economic institutions,” up to the 1830s southern abolitionists had freed “44,541” more slaves than northern anti-slavery advocates. “My belief,” Herbert shared, “is that the South, if left alone, would have fallen into line with the growing sentiment of the age and long before this would have found its way to emancipation.” Herbert added that a simultaneous Northern offer of federally-compensated emancipation would have made complete southern abolition without war a near certainty. It had been northern abolitionists’ visceral objection to this sensible program that shipwrecked peace.<sup>43</sup>

As with many aspects of the Lost Cause memory, Herbert’s assertions about southern slavery’s future displayed some glaring inconsistencies. If the institution had been a “bed-rock,” then it was not likely to have ended short of a cataclysmic event, namely abolitionist agitation

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., July 22, 1906. Although Herbert admitted that the South had “lost its head” by forcing the issue on the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, and that white Southerners’ knee-jerk aggressiveness ought to have been tempered with cool judgment, his history laid most offenses at the feet of the North. The phrase “blundering generation” originated in James G. Randall’s eponymous article in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (June 1940): 3-28. For a review of scholarly explanations of the coming of the war, see Frank Towers, “Partisans, New History, and Modernization: The Historiography of the Civil War’s Causes, 1861-2011,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (June 2011): 237-264.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

leading to civil war and emancipation. If on the other hand southern slave-holders could liberate their chattel without pause or regret, and if the institution would have faded away gradually as Herbert contended, then it had not been a “bed-rock” and southern fear of and anger at abolitionists had been much ado about nothing. More to the point, Herbert’s remarks on a compensated emancipation program that never was ignored the existence of actual programs in the antebellum and wartime years, all rejected by the majority of slaveholders. Herbert and other Lost Cause acolytes wanted it both ways, seeking to preserve white southern innocence of the war’s outbreak in any possible scenario.<sup>44</sup>

Yet if Herbert’s doctrine seems cognitively dissonant to modern minds, it was hardly exceptional in that regard. As scholars of memory continue to discover, national mythologies are not meant to provide objective, logical coherence about the past, if that were ever possible or desirable. Rather they offer psychosocial closure and instill common feeling. To Herbert, too much speculation about the whys, wherefores, and might-have-beens of southern slavery risked obscuring the basic facts. North and South had lived together in peace since the birth of the republic, and the slaves had been quiescent. Then suddenly Northerners and Southerners had started hating each other, slaves had started rebelling, southern slave holders had given up on gradual emancipation, a national party committed to emancipation had formed, and southern states had seceded. Herbert could not stomach the idea that this sequence of events had been either rational or inevitable. To do so would call into question everything he likely believed about the nature of states, societies, or peoples. There had to have been a contingent factor operating, and to Herbert the only factor that explained it all was the abolition movement’s

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<sup>44</sup>William C. Davis, *The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Vol. I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (Oxford University Press, 1990); Towns, *Enduring Legacy*.

deadly intemperance. “Fanaticism made us forget that we were brothers,” Herbert noted with regret, “and we did not call it to mind until rivers of blood had flowed.”<sup>45</sup>

Herbert’s introduction quoted freely from national historians such as James Ford Rhodes and abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and William Goodell. It helped Herbert that the insistent, uncompromising, and angry tone of Garrison’s *Liberator* articles proved his charge of abolitionists’ insanity, although most of Herbert’s citations came from the moderate Rhodes, whose *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the McKinley-Brian Campaign of 1896* (1893-1896) was then the standard work in the field. Northern-born Rhodes did not subscribe to the Lost Cause, and his works stressed slavery’s centrality to southern secession and mobilization---unlike Herbert, who maintained in the face of his own emphasis on the growth of anti-slavery that Alabama’s Confederates had fought to save the Constitution. Yet Rhodes’ study served Herbert’s purpose well enough because it portrayed the abolitionists as an annoying, distasteful, and intolerant bunch deserving opprobrium. The nationalist Rhodes would also have applauded the reconciliatory concluding paragraph of Herbert’s introduction: “Now...the scales have fallen from our eyes and we see each other as we are. Mutual respect has been restored. Courage, devotion and patriotic self-sacrifice, North and South, have done their perfect work...”<sup>46</sup> Calm and friendly relations between the blue and the gray, untainted by noxious minorities or social-justice warriors, had made Herbert’s and Rhodes’ post-bellum America great again.

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<sup>45</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, July 22, 1906. Of the already-sizeable and ever-increasing catalog of general memory studies, useful works for this study included Connerton, *How Societies Remember*; John R Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Coser, editing and translation (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* (Columbia University Press, 1992); Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid*; John David Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History: Historical Conflicts, Trends, and Methods, 1866-1953* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999); Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret their Civil War* (Princeton University Press, 1954).

We do not know if Rhodes ever read Herbert's history, but Owen thoroughly congratulated Herbert on his work. Yet Herbert did not like what the *Advertiser* had done with it. Several columns were out-of-order and many words had been misspelled. "There were many grievous mistakes in the article," Herbert griped to Owen, and "In many places the meaning was unintelligible. I do not think the Advertiser ever did any job or work, at any time, that was quite as bad as this." He wanted to fix his work before submitting it for binding and publication, and Owen graciously offered to help edit.<sup>47</sup>

Based on their correspondence and a few typed pages in the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama's file, Herbert envisioned putting even more military information in the book version. He intended to talk more about the results of battles for the benefit of general readers who might not have read many Civil War studies. He also wanted to assess why the Army of Northern Virginia had been so successful until the end. He had concluded that, "in the beginning at least the Southerners were the better horsemen and marksmen."<sup>48</sup> Fighting for their homes gave white Southerners a "moral advantage." Confederate generals also had been more capable.<sup>49</sup> He noted that, "the prestige of victory counts for a great deal, and especially in the Eastern Theater...this prestige was with the Confederates as to most of the great battles that were fought," with victory invariably leading to

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<sup>47</sup>Herbert to Owen, April 18 and September 25, 1907, Owen to Herbert, September 27, 1907, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

<sup>48</sup>"Preface," October 1907, 3-4, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH. Scholars continue to dispute the extent of martial-mindedness in the antebellum South: John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1860-1861* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), and Grady McWhiney & Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982) believe it was significant, whereas Haughton, *Seeds of Failure*, regards the prototypical white Southerner born a man-at-arms as one more mythical component of Lost Cause memory.

<sup>49</sup>"Preface," October 1907, 3-4, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH. James M. McPherson's work highlights these factors, e.g., in *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and "American Victory, American Defeat," in Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 15-42.

yet more victory.<sup>50</sup> A fifth reason, cleverly tucked into the second, was race pride, for “every Confederate soldier, slaveholder and non-slaveholder, felt it in his very bones that the supremacy of his race was actually involved in the contest...”<sup>51</sup>

Ideally, and despite certain of his opinions, Herbert also came to believe that his book could be a standard in military history North as well as South if he adopted a more generous and accommodating tone in some parts of the story. He now planned to begin the book with a reprint of friendly letters between himself and the former colonel of New Jersey troops who had fought him at Salem Church. He also decided to muffle some of his criticism. “I am also shading it a little where I discover that the tone is too controversial,” Herbert told Owen. Herbert seems to have been referring to a new preface in which he stated that “Northerner and Southerner have happily since that terrible war come together in a more perfect Union than ever existed before,” and acknowledged that “there were wrongs on both sides.” Nonetheless, Herbert would not jettison the anti-abolition introduction, even at the cost of turning off northern publishers. Owen not only supported him, but promised to go to bat for Herbert on this issue, telling him, “I myself will likewise urge it.”<sup>52</sup>

Yet despite Owen’s assistance, no bound published version of Herbert’s revised regimental history ever appeared. The regiment’s file at the ADAH does show that Herbert went over the newspaper copy at length. Mostly however, Herbert’s changes were cosmetic, substituting one word for another or adding an entire phrase and thereby increasing the overall

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<sup>50</sup>Preface,” October 1907, 3-4, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH. See also Michael C. C. Adams, *Our Masters the Rebels: A Speculation on Union Military Failure in the East, 1861-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), which traces the psychological inverse of this idea on the other side.

<sup>51</sup>“Preface,” October 1907, 3-4, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH.

<sup>52</sup>“Preface,” October 1907, 2-3; Owen to Herbert, September 27, 1907 and March 24, 1915; Herbert to Owen, October 8, 1907 and May 4, 1915, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH.

length. He did not shift the narrative thrust or reconsider any substantial part of his analysis. Two of the longest insertions concern an unnamed soldier killed at the September 1862 Battle of Antietam, Maryland, and a remark that if Lee was as short of ammunition at Gettysburg as some had said, “the rank and file did not know it.” Whatever substantive changes Herbert wanted to make, he revised little.<sup>53</sup>

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McMorries’ history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama and Herbert’s history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama gave Owen more than he could have asked for. A few other veterans gave Owen creditable sketches of their regiments. Colonel John Inzer submitted a by-the-numbers sketch of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment for departmental column “No. 10” (September 29, 1901), enlivened with a jab at Union General Joseph Hooker for taking all day to sweep the regiment off its position at Lookout Mountain, Tennessee in November 1863. George Brewer of the 46<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment also played historian for Owen with a two-issue account of his unit, comprising all of departmental columns “No. 25” (February 9, 1902) and “No. 26” (February 16, 1902). A posthumous sketch of the 48<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment by its late lieutenant colonel, delivered by the regiment’s veterans and pre-edited by 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry colonel William Oates, was an easy submission for column “No. 28” (March 9, 1902).<sup>54</sup> With such results, Owen had good reason to believe that every Alabama Confederate unit’s services would be immortalized in the dailies and available on bookshelves.

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<sup>53</sup>“History of the Eighth Alabama Volunteer Infantry Regt., C.S.A,” clippings pasted on paper, marginalia, 25, CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024892, ADAH.

<sup>54</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, September 29, 1901, February 9, 1902, February 16, 1902, March 9, 1902. A few brief sketches had also appeared in volumes of the AHS’ *Transactions* journal before the founding of the ADAH.

But Owen never duplicated these early successes. McMorries' history remained the only regimental printed in bound form under the auspices of the ADAH, and Herbert's history was the last regimental the *Advertiser* ran. Owen had planned to send the Alabama legislature copies of narratives for all units no later than the 1907 opening session, but that turned out to be an overly optimistic timetable. Years after the deadline, most Alabama Confederate units still did not have histories. Indeed after few brief remarks on ongoing regimental sketches in the 1905 board meeting, Owen never brought up the project again, neither to the trustees nor the press. Thereafter, there were periodic notices that other veterans had written regimental histories for Owen, yet none of these histories appeared in the papers or in a departmental bulletin.<sup>55</sup>

What happened? Owen never openly blamed anyone for the failure of his grand vision of complete regimental histories for Alabama, but he implied that some of the veterans had not stepped up to the plate. "The preparation of such sketches is obviously the duty of survivors," Owen reminded the ADAH board in 1902, "and I have therefore appealed to some one or more of each to undertake the work." What the director found was that for every Brewer, DuBose, Herbert, or McMorries, there were several like T. M. Riley, who pleaded stress, decrepitude, and incapacity as reasons for not writing a sketch of his 5<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. "While it could be thought an easy matter to secure sketches," Owen came to realize that "the contrary is

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<sup>55</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1904"; *Jones Valley Times*, October 20, 1904; "The 25<sup>th</sup> Alabama Regiment," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 9, 1904; "Minutes and Annual Report, 1905"; "Gen Battle Is Dying," *Troy Messenger*, April 12, 1905; "History," *Montgomery Times*, December 24, 1906; "Gallant Fourth Alabama," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 25, 1909. The University of Tennessee Press has since published an earlier version of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry regimental, referenced in the *Advertiser* article, for its Voices of the Civil War series as Jeffrey D. Stocker, ed., *From Huntsville to Appomattox: R. T. Coles' History of 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Alabama Volunteer Infantry* (2005).

true. Instead of readily complying with our wishes, in the majority of cases the effort is rather to escape the duty.”<sup>56</sup>

Setting aside lack of scholarly skills, another reason for most veterans’ reluctance to write Owen’s sketches may have been the absence of financial incentive. By the new century, veterans of all ranks and their survivors regularly wrote in hopes of payment. Owen in contrast had always made it clear that “The entire work is a labor of love,” because of the department’s starvation budget. Regimental scribes who chose to take up the effort worked on their own dime, with the promise of nothing more than “fifty copies of the particular history in pamphlet form” waiting at the end.<sup>57</sup> Few of them had the means to do all that Owen asked. Contributing rosters, rolls, and reminiscences was far less demanding than writing articles or books.

Even if one veteran in every single unit had written a regimental history for the ADAH, almost certainly the majority would never have appeared in print.<sup>58</sup> Assuming the *Advertiser’s* editors had been extremely generous and agreed in 1902 to run one regimental sketch a month in the Sunday edition---a highly questionable assumption given their primary commitment to *news* (not history)---at the average rate McMorries and Herbert wrote, Owen’s project might not have been completed before President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s third term. Long before that point, changes in scholarship, methodology, and sources used would have rendered the sketches passé and outdated, just as we regard them now. Also, the sketches’ widely varying lengths, contents,

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<sup>56</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1902,” n. p.; Cone, “Archiving Regiments.”

<sup>57</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Cone, “Archiving Regiments,” 222. A 1915 postscript to Herbert’s preface noted that the revised history of the 8<sup>th</sup> had “lain...unpublished for want of appropriations,” “Preface,” CRHF, 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG02489, ADAH.

<sup>58</sup>Owen cannibalized some of the other veterans’ regimental sketches for a five-part series, “Montgomery County Soldiers in the War,” which ran November 13, 20, and 27, and December 4 and 18, 1910 in the *Montgomery Advertiser*.

and approaches made their collective publication in bound form unlikely. Comparing Brewer's cursory history of the 17<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment with Herbert's novella, for example, a government editor would probably have thrown up his hands and declared that the two were far too different to appear in the same volume. More editorial discretion on Owen's part, instead of the hands-off approach he took with Herbert, would probably have been the better part of valor. What effect Owen's trimming might have had on their friendly interactions we cannot say.

But Owen did not hang all his hopes and dreams on the regimental histories project. It was, after all, only a project, something to try for a while. Owen's few biographers have noted that when it came to writing, he tended to lose interest quickly, often starting many different things but rarely completing them.<sup>59</sup> That was fine; the ADAH was an archive with a small publishing wing, not a publishing company. As Owen repeatedly stated, his first mission was collection. When it came to Civil War materials, unit records were to Owen's thinking the main course, the sketches his dessert. The main value of both was their usefulness to the archives' visitors and Owen's correspondents. While his repository steadily filled with papers, histories, and information, Owen opened it up to the general public.

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<sup>59</sup>Doster, "Owen"; Finch, "Preserver."

## 6. Accessing the Alabama Archives: General Requests and Public Interactions

Archival access in the twenty-first century can be a contested matter. Against the dominant, public view that the whole reason to have archives is so that people can use them, there is a contending, professional view privileging the preservation of records above the public's right to see and touch them. This can sometimes lead to users and archivists talking past each other, with both sides aware that the other side has a point but neither side willing to concede theirs. The majority of archivists want people to walk through their doors and handle their records, and the majority of people want archival records cared for, even if in special cases that means they cannot access them. Archival emergencies such as the threatened shut-down of the Georgia state archives in 2012 usually bring the public and the professionals together.<sup>1</sup>

Inexperienced as he was in archival management, Thomas Owen took a simpler view of access, one that was considerably pro-public. He did not found and fill an archival department just to keep it sealed off, as he felt the War Department had done to him. From the start, Owen believed the records kept in the ADAH were meant to be used. As seen, this was particularly true of Alabama Confederates' service records, for unless veterans and their families had the right to use such materials they would likely not get pensions. Besides being a pension support bureau, Owen's archives served as an information clearinghouse and historical request center. The director assisted professional scholars, to be sure, as discussed in the next chapter. More

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<sup>1</sup>“Georgia Threatens Closure of State Archives,” Society of American Archivists, updated October 22, 2012, <https://www2.archivists.org/news/2012/georgia-threatens-closure-of-state-archives>; Kristina Torres, “Georgia Archives will stay open,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, , October 18, 2012, <https://www.ajc.com/news/georgia-archives-will-stay-open/1s8SVxPExcW8BjE8u8RXTJ/>; Kristina Torres, “Georgia Archives thriving under new management,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, December 24, 2015, <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/georgia-archives-thriving-under-new-management/XXIoKrwrsv2mJVB9QW2hPK/> (all accessed February 21, 2020).

often, however, those who accessed the ADAH were non-academics looking for specific things. As most archives visitors today fall in the same category, it is well worth looking at how Owen interacted with the general public.

First Owen had to get his department's holdings organized, for archival materials are of little use unless they have been arranged, described, and filed away. Archivists in Owen's era were mostly concerned with putting records in the best order. As a matter of fact, the first formal guide for archival work was the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (1898), written by three Dutch professionals. As the title demonstrates, the *Manual* was almost exclusively a treatise on sorting and classifying record groups.<sup>2</sup> Owen likely never read the *Manual*; he certainly never mentioned it in any of his letters. Nor apart from passing references to the Dewey decimal system did Owen mention borrowing any arrangement or classification systems.<sup>3</sup> At the top level, Owen divided the archives' paper collections into three broad groups, one comprising state government records and correspondence, the second letters to social and historical groups, and the third and by far the largest "all materials bearing upon the history of Alabama."<sup>4</sup>

For the Civil War era, Owen created three different schemes of classification, sometimes with Lost Cause terminology. One of unlisted date organized his correspondence on the subject. Secondary sources on the war corresponded to the first few code numbers, followed by monuments, pensions, soldiers' homes, dead and surviving Confederates, the Confederate

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<sup>2</sup>Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 17-63.

<sup>3</sup>Owen noted in a letter to Mrs. T. C. Galbreath, October 31, 1919, Classification, SG016723, AF-TO, ADAH: "We have carefully avoided the confusion which is sure to arise, from the use of the Dewey Decimal Classification. Indeed, we have never considered any very minute classification at all important or advisable."

<sup>4</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1906," n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

heritage organizations, and the National Military Parks. He reserved Number 1.6 for “Condemned Books,” and assigned code numbers 10 – 22 to Confederate materials and artifacts, including flags, maps, pictures, seals, stamps, songs, and uniforms. The events leading up to the war, mainly dates of southern states’ secession, covered code numbers 29 – 65, with 36 given to “The Black Republican Party.” Owen assigned code number 66 to the Confederate Army, with nine sub-points for the army’s branches of service, recruitment methods, and principal military departments. Code number 67, “Arms and Equipment,” had only one sub-point, “Canteens,” indicating that Owen’s correspondents had them and wanted to donate them to the archives’ museum.<sup>5</sup>

Owen further divided the war years amongst 31 code numbers, assigning 69 to “Campaigns,” 78 to “Internal dissentions [and] Union sentiment,” 81, 82, and 83 to wartime churches, wartime religion, and southern women, 86 and 87 to northern and southern prisoner-of-war camps, and 90 to “Numbers and Losses.” “Negroes” (Code number 85) had five sub-points, three of them---“In the home,” “In Confederate service,” and “In Confederate defenses”---aligned with white southern faith in the fidelity of enslaved African-Americans. Owen grudgingly acknowledged some slave resistance via another sub-point of 85, “In Federal service.” Code numbers 88 and 89 contrasted the character of Confederate and Union soldiers. The last two codes went to Union and Confederate biographies.<sup>6</sup>

In a second system, Owen classified Alabama’s Confederate archives. This system was simpler than the correspondence classification codes, with only 13 numerals. Numbers 1, 2, and

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<sup>5</sup> “War of Secession – Organization of Files, Class Numbers 0-100,” Classification, SG016723, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Other codes of note include 60 (“Attitude of the North, Copperheads”), 73 (“Raiders, Bushwhackers, Guerrillas”), and 76 (“Peace Movements”).

3 corresponded to “Military Appointments, Resignations, and Removals,” the state militia, and impressments of farm goods for the war effort. Numbers 4 and 5 corresponded to the state’s secession convention papers and special wartime legislation. Several other numbers dealt with the first year of enlistments, units’ elections, and the estate settlements for dead soldiers. Number 11 embraced what Owen tellingly called the “War of Secession,” and featured eight sub-points under “Statistics of Organization.” These sub-points encompassed early volunteers, the state’s military organization at the beginning of hostilities (the “Army of Alabama”), state units in Confederate service, Confederate regular units that included Alabama companies, the reserves, the militia, and local defense units.<sup>7</sup>

Owen introduced the third classification system for the ADAH, bound in a volume entitled *Dr. Owen’s Classification of Dept. Files*, in 1909. Here, Owen’s departmental emphasis on collection over research was evident. The first eight code numbers corresponded to manuscripts, the federal-state service records project, the department’s regimental histories series, the 1907 census returns, and pensions. Also evident was an institutional focus one would expect from a scientific history scholar. Of code numbers for topical matters, most focused on groups, associations, and establishments rather than events. Code number 220 dealt with indigent relief societies, code number 228 with war hospitals, code numbers 250 – 255 with camps, posts, arsenals, and fortifications, code number 258 with prisons, and code number 259 with industries. Conscription, Hilliard’s Legions, and the enlistment of University of Alabama students received their own separate codes. On a page later pasted over, Owen created codes for

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<sup>7</sup> “Memorandum for Tentative Organization and Arrangement of State Archives 1861-1865,” n. p., from *Ala. Dept. of Archives and History Suggestions for Work Processes, etc.* (bound volume), Classification, SG016723, AF-TO, ADAH.

“Speculators” (244) and “Federal Troops from Alabama” (270), both unpleasant topics Owen clearly had little interest in amplifying.

The two most notable differences between this classification system and the first are greater simplicity about African Americans’ historical roles and mention of Reconstruction. In the 1909 system there were no code numbers or sub-points for emancipation or the USCT. Instead, code number 297, “Negroes in state defense,” assumed that all of Alabama’s chattel class served the Confederacy. Code number 300 meanwhile addressed the years of Yankee occupation and carpetbagger domination. Several of its sub-points obviously reflect the work of “Dunning School” member Walter L. Fleming: “Ku Klux Klan,” “Alabama Debt Settlement,” “F[l]eming’s Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama,” “The Loyal League in Alabama,” “Negroes in Reconstruction Time,” and “The Freedmen’s Bureau.”<sup>8</sup>

Owen’s points and sub-points ultimately identify his biases and his limited conception of what topics were important. To be fair, Owen was “self-trained as an archivist.” He must have picked up most of his work practices from the few collecting agencies that predated the ADAH at a time when there was little standardization or “best practices.” If he “never fully mastered archival organization, arrangements, classification, or cataloging,” neither had they. Even the leading classification systems of its time, the Dewey Decimal System, contained all sorts of

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<sup>8</sup>*Alabama Dept. of Archives and History Dr. Owen’s Organization of Dept. Files, 1909, Classification, SG016723, AF-TO, ADAH.* A fourth, incomplete 1905 system lists topics without code numbers. The topics however are illuminating: “Alabama Women,” “National Military Parks,” “Flags of Alabama Commands,” “Negroes,” “U.S. War Records,” “Emma Sansom, [Confederate] heroine,” “Alabama Division, U.S.C.V.,” and “Owen as Commander-in-Chief, U.S.C.V.,” “Minutes and Annual Report, 1905,” 4, Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

cultural biases.<sup>9</sup> For an early twentieth century archives fielding requests almost entirely from like-minded white Southerners, Owen's various systems seem to have been sufficient.<sup>10</sup>

Twice Owen specified the filing systems he was using. Until 1905 the department apparently kept everything in file boxes, but at the end of the next year Owen told the board of trustees that he had tossed aside that "old fashioned" system "except as a [temporary] storing receptacle." From then on the department would use "the modern and up to date" system of vertical files.<sup>11</sup>

Less than a year before his death, Owen explained his filing system in greater depth to the Colorado State Historical Society:

All of our unofficial manuscripts are kept in vertical files, the groups arranged in folders, the folders given a date corresponding with the date of the gift. These folders are arranged in vertical file transfer boxes manufactured by the Library Bureau in small sizes, and open at the side with drop flap. The boxes are put on the shelves, and each given a number. A card is prepared for every item, the call number being the box number. In this way we are

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<sup>9</sup>For a study of the biases of the Dewey Decimal System, see Wayne A. Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melvil Dewey* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996).

<sup>10</sup>Doster, "Owen," 107; Richard J. Cox, "Professionalism and Archivists in the United States," *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986): 229-247, and "American Archival Literature: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901-1987," *Ibid.*, 50 (Summer 1987): 306-323. Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History*, dates the "era of systematic archival collection and management in the South" (152) to the early 1930s' establishment of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina and the Manuscript Collection at Duke.

<sup>11</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1906," n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

able to reach any of the thousands of documents in our collection with comparative ease...

Our collection of maps is arranged by numbers. All are mounted, and some are in rolls, and others folded in books. Card indexes make the collection easily accessible...

Printed handbooks, programs and other miscellaneous material of that character are classified as Broadsides. They are kept in boxes, the boxes are numbered, and card indexes provided...<sup>12</sup>

So much for Owen's classification and filing systems; we can now consider the ways that regular users accessed the archives. Non-academic requests from the early ADAH can be grouped into four categories: personal requests, principally pensions; general information access and services; assistance to grammar school and heritage association; and editorial requests. Personal requests bulked large, reflecting Owen's stated commitment to helping ex-Confederates obtain state pensions. Correspondence with veterans about war records might elicit delicately-phrased pleas from the old men. Veterans knew that Owen was on the pension board and that his department's collections were the means behind the board's "great deal of careful study...in order not to put any unworthy applicant on the roll and to keep from turning down any that ought participate."<sup>13</sup> By directly pleading with Owen, a veteran hoped that he might better his chances of passing the review and pocketing a check.

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<sup>12</sup>Owen to Galbreath, October 31, 1919, Classification, SG016723, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>13</sup>"Pension Board Will Consider Applications of Over 500," *Montgomery Times*, October 16, 1915.

Pleading was not the same thing as abject abasement, for the veterans had their pride. Most seem to have silently believed that archival cooperation with Owen---rustling up old papers, helping revise and update rosters and rolls, and recounting tales of soldiering---entitled them to some state financial support. A handful however, such as A. M. Bradford of the 10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment, thought it a fair trade to bargain artifacts for cash. Once in a while too, an aging ex-Confederate put the onus on the state (and Owen) to deliver. J. M. Thompson of the 55<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment, for example, brought the matter of pensions to the forefront after patiently transcribing nine pages of data about his officers, his unit, and himself at Owen's request. "I am a very poor man," Thompson stated bluntly, "[and] I have never complained. I know that the state of Ala. has and is paying a considerable amount of money to the Confederate soldiers." Yet it seemed to Thompson that Alabama was less than generous towards its native Confederate sons. Money always seemed to be available for government officials, teachers, and "school[s] for each Race." When soldiers' pensions were on the table however, funds were always short: "Last year their pittance was cut and I suppose it will be this year." Thompson knew he had no guarantee of getting the money he needed. Still, he wanted the pension board to know that turning him down would only prove their callousness towards a model soldier. "I never missed a march made by our company," Thompson boasted in a postscript, "I was in every battle and every skirmish...I was never placed under arrest or on extra duty...I was always respected by my men and Superior officers."<sup>14</sup>

Of a sample group of 172 letters from Owen to pension-seekers, 62 were addressed to either ex-Confederates or their family members. Thirty-one men and twenty-five women can be identified as sons, daughters, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren of former Confederate

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<sup>14</sup>J. M. Thompson to Owen, June 21, 1909, CRHF, 55<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024908, ADAH.

soldiers. Women were more likely than men to claim kinship (25 of 45 female correspondents, versus 31 of 88 male correspondents). Seven veterans wrote to Owen seeking data that would confirm their past service.

Almost-two thirds of the responses, however, were addressed to individuals not obviously related to ex-Confederates. A further thirty correspondents were state or local officials, including clerks, judges, lawyers, newspaper editors, sheriffs, state adjutants, and one Secretary of Pensions for Florida's state government. Still, most of these official correspondents wrote on behalf of ex-Confederate applicants, clients, and personal acquaintances. Moreover, the correspondence dates from the same time (1913-1917) that the last sizeable cohort in gray was dying out. If ever Confederate veterans and their families needed help from Alabama's archives, this would have been the time.<sup>15</sup>

Owen's collection of military information proved particularly useful during the semi-centennial anniversary of Gettysburg (1913). In preparation for their traveling to the exercises, Owen drafted a form letter of introduction for Alabama's Confederate veterans to have filled in and used. The earliest letter, marked "Duplicate for Guide," announced that "the original manuscript records of Alabama troops in the War of Secession...evidence and show that [soldier's name], now an honored citizen of [city/town, county], served as a member of [company, regiment] from [dates of service]." For further reference, the letter noted that the bearer's regiment "was a part of [brigade, army]" and his record was "inseparable from the history of that gallant command." Armed with the bare facts of his service, as outlined by the

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<sup>15</sup>This sample group was selected from 4 surveyed folders of 13 total folders, Inquiries, Confederate, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

archives, any Alabamian veteran who carried such a letter was “eminently worthy of [the] confidence” of the War Department and the reunion staff. Blank spaces for the countersignatures of Alabama’s governor and secretary of state proved a veteran’s claim to be who he said he was. If necessary, stationary featuring a wartime photo of the veteran would establish his bona fides, although only John Purifoy, one-time state auditor, treasurer, legislator, and probate judge of Wilcox County, seems to have been so honored.<sup>16</sup>

Incomplete records for Alabama Confederates shut some doors. Contacts like one Dr. Glass who had no idea what unit his ancestor had served in received Owen’s regrets. With so many Alabama Confederates’ service records to consider, Owen informed Glass, bare names were not enough for him to go on. Then too, some applicants mistakenly believed that Owen was the de facto head of the pension bureau. Even families of non-combatant Confederates thought that Owen was their ticket to remuneration. A mail carrier’s widow who sought Owen’s support stood doggedly on her right for state support. The only reason her late husband had not been a soldier was because his two brothers already were and his father had thought that was enough patriotism for one family. His service, she asserted, was no less honorable than if he had been in uniform, and those soldiers who got mail from him would agree with her. Another Confederate widow living in Atlanta, Mrs. Posey, was more realistic. She had already been rejected by the pension bureaus in Alabama and Georgia, and she did not trouble Owen with taking up her case a third time. Instead, Posey only wanted from Owen a list of survivors from

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<sup>16</sup>“An Alabama Soldier At Gettysburg,” *Lineville Headlight*, September 26, 1913; John Purifoy form letter, June 27, 1913, Inquiries, Confederate, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH; “Alabama Constitutional Officers - John Purifoy,” Alabama Department of Archives and History, updated September 22, 2009, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.archives.alabama.gov/conoff/purifoy.html>.

her husband's unit. He had been a Mason, she said, and maybe some of his comrades were also members of the order and would honor his memory by lending money to her.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Owen's efforts could be frustrated by those well-known for their uncooperativeness. Philip Bellantoni, formerly of the 21<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment and removed to New York City, learned this the hard way when in the summer of 1910 he sought documentation of his service and wounding at Shiloh. Owen put Bellantoni in touch with his state representative, Richmond Hobson, and through Hobson with the United States War Department. Enter Frederick Ainsworth, spouting his stock response about priorities. As there was no roll in Washington for Bellantoni's company, only a list of names for men of the 21<sup>st</sup> Alabama, Ainsworth refused to reproduce the information, for that would amount to providing statistics. Long familiar with Ainsworth's excuses, Owen told Bellantoni to apply in his own name; the adjutant general would be legally bound to honor his request. Somehow Bellantoni's application fell through the cracks anyway, or else Ainsworth found another airtight way to say no. Owen too lost track of Bellantoni's case. Three years later an Anglican priest wrote Owen on behalf of Bellantoni, probably because the old Confederate was too ill to do it himself. "Mr. Bellantoni complied with your request as well as he was able after so many years," the clergyman reminded Owen, "and he is very anxious to know what success you had...All that he

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<sup>17</sup>Owen to Dr. J. P. Glass, April 15, 1910, Mrs. E. W. Hammond to Owen, May 16, 1917, Correspondence, SG016701, AF-TO, ADAH; Mrs. G. W. Posey to Owen, February 10, 1909, Correspondence, SG016705, AF-TO, ADAH.

seeks is such recognition at reunions and that he may be able to connect himself with a neighboring post of the [UCV].”<sup>18</sup> Sadly, Owen could not help Bellantoni even that much.

Juliet Opie Ayres’ attempts to get succor came to the same end. Ayres’ back story was a Dickensian tale of woe upon woe. The widowed child-bride of Union General Romeyn B. Ayres, she was also the niece and adopted daughter of Juliet Opie Gordon-Hopkins, a minor Confederate celebrity. Gordon-Hopkins’ ancestors were the notable Virginia Opie family, from which she had inherited a fortune. When the war started, Gordon-Hopkins had patriotically liquidated her \$200,000 bequest for the Confederate war effort, left Alabama for Richmond, and became a battlefield nurse. She gained renown as the “Florence Nightingale of the South,” and was praised and honored by Confederate statesmen and soldiers. A severe wound suffered at the 1862 Battle of Seven Pines, Virginia while dragging a wounded officer to safety had crippled her. Confederate defeat wiped out the last of Gordon-Hopkins’ portfolio, and after the death of her second husband, Alabama Judge Francis Hopkins, she was penniless.<sup>19</sup>

Niece Juliet’s marriage to the considerably senior General Ayres had kept the little family solvent, the general’s federal pension passing to his widow upon his death in 1888. After Gordon-Hopkins died in 1890, Ayres got along for a time on the support of friends and a nursing stint of her own in the Spanish-American War. Then an unspecified malady left Ayres’ teenage daughter permanently bedridden, and Ayres’ own health gave out caring for her.<sup>20</sup> Adopted mother gone, husband gone, money nearly gone, Ayres, living precariously in Colorado, worried

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<sup>18</sup>Philip Bellantoni to Owen, June 22 and July 5, 1910, F. Ainsworth to Owen, July 8, 1910, Owen to Bellantoni, July 16, 1910 (all found in CRHF, 21<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024898, AF-TO, ADAH); John Marshall Chew to Owen, September 24, 1913, Correspondence, SG106701, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>19</sup>“Florence Nightingale Of The South,” *Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), October 11, 1903.

<sup>20</sup>“Noble Woman’s Work,” *Raleigh Times*, May 5, 1898; Newspaper clipping, n. p., June 18, 1900, Martin, TN., Box 1, Hopkins Family Papers, LPR57, ADAH.

what would happen to her poor daughter when she herself was gone. She turned to the record keeper of her adopted mother's state in desperation.

"I am distressed day & night over my child's future," Ayres confessed to Owen in 1917. "At my death my pension ends. [My daughter] has not one relative on either side of the family to turn to." Ineligible for federal support, Ayres hoped that southern heritage organizations would assist her in honor of her adopted mother's Confederate gift and personal services. She asked Owen if he had an original record of the Gordon-Hopkins donation. When Owen replied that he did not, Ayres determined to appeal directly to the southern people. She was sure "there are some in the South who remember mothers['] devotion to them in their hour of need," especially if they read a testimonial for Gordon-Hopkins in major southern newspapers. Ayres had such a testimonial in hand, written by Confederate General Joseph Wheeler. She wanted Owen's help enlisting newspaper editors.<sup>21</sup>

On Owen's suggestion, Ayres sent the Wheeler testimonial to the *Birmingham Age-Herald* with an added endorsement from Mrs. John P. Poe, head of the Maryland UDC. Having only one copy of the testimonial, she asked Owen for a back-up copy. Wheeler's testimonial had ran in the March 13, 1907 issue of the *Selma Times*, and a re-typed version filed with the director's correspondence shows that he found that issue. It is unclear however whether Owen provided the back-up copy as requested. Ayres' increasingly frantic letters suggest that he did not. Until the *Age-Herald* returned her copy of Wheeler's testimonial, she told Owen, there was no point in contacting the *Louisville Courier*. Worse, the *Age-Herald's* editor had not responded

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<sup>21</sup>Juliet Opie Ayres to Owen, February 1, 1917, and ditto, handwritten note, n.d., Hopkins Family Papers, ADAH.

in any way. Far away from the scene, she begged Owen to keep the editor on track and to coordinate the efforts of the *Age-Herald* and the *Courier*.<sup>22</sup>

After hearing nothing for three weeks, Ayres gave up on the Birmingham press. She requested that Owen contact Montgomery and Mobile papers. Having heard that one Mobile editor was a Catholic, she forwarded Owen a letter from the Bishop of Wheeling, West Virginia, her daughter's godfather, to pass on. Although Ayres' public petition rested on her connection to a Confederate heroine, her friends had advised her to excise Wheeler's statement that she was Gordon-Hopkins' niece. Her status as an adopted daughter, they thought, might weaken her case. Ayres wanted to be truthful; Gordon-Hopkins had been her aunt, but had taken care of her as a real mother would. Still, she feared that her honesty might backfire. Ayres also suspected that Southerners would never help a Yankee general's widow, so she asked Owen what he thought: should she conceal her background?<sup>23</sup>

Owen wrote three brief letters to Ayres' lengthier five. He assured Ayres that given General Wheeler's stature in the South, a testimonial from him carried the same weight as a Confederate report from the *OR*. Ayres therefore did not need to conceal anything about her adoption or marriage. More to the point, Owen repeatedly told Ayres to rely on her own judgment. She need not seek his advice before contacting any particular newspaper. As for Ayres' daughter Juliet, Owen suggested that a sanitarium would be the best place to send her.

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<sup>22</sup>Ayres to Owen, February 1 and April 5 and 23, 1917, Hopkins Family Papers, ADAH; "Mrs. Arthur F. Hopkins, A Distinguished Philanthropic And Patriotic Woman," *The Selma Times*, March 13, 1907.

<sup>23</sup>Ayres to Owen, April 29, 1917, Bishop P. J. Donahue to Owen, May 3, 1917, Hopkins Family Papers, ADAH.

Owen's final letter, written in August 1917, reminded Ayres that since the United States' entry into the First World War he had been busy with new government responsibilities and had no more time to spare. Taken in total, Owen's letters to Ayres lack some of his usual warmth. Indeed his frustration was evident by the end. "You know that I have not been unwilling to be of assistance to you," he wrote, "but it has been impossible for me to do anything whatever. I cannot understand why it is necessary for me to do more." Owen never mentioned forwarding Ayres' appeal, writing letters to heritage organizations, or contacting any southern newspaper editors. Stranger still, a reminder about the Ayres case from his father-in-law's senatorial secretary prompted no reply from Owen. Ayres' appeal never appeared in any major southern newspaper.<sup>24</sup>

The director's apparent holding of Ayres at arm's length is baffling when one considers her case. A daughter of the "Florence Nightingale of the South" should have been a cause célèbre with the benefit of better press. Ayres could have received some donations if even one newspaper had run her story. Although Owen did not run the state's press, just as he did not run the pension bureau, he had considerable influence nonetheless. One word from Owen and the UCV, UDC, and USCV likely would have had checkbooks open and pens ready, yet there are no letters referencing the Ayres case in the files of these organizations either. It is hard to believe that Owen did nothing for Ayres, but we have no evidence that he did any specific thing other than name one newspaper. As her letters to Ayres indicate, Marie Owen gave Ayres some

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<sup>24</sup>Owen to Ayres, February 1, 1916, February 3 and August 23, 1917, Ayres to John H. Bankhead, August 4, 1919, C. A. Beasley to Owen, August 11, 1919, Hopkins Family Papers, ADAH; Keyword searches, 1917-1922 inclusive, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

support when she succeeded her husband as director. The ultimate fates of Juliet Opie Ayres and her invalid daughter after that remain unknown.<sup>25</sup>

Not every Confederate-related letter pertained to pensions. Correspondents might simply want to clarify some aspects of their ancestors' military services. One transplant Alabamian suspected that his father's memories of serving in the Confederate garrison at Pensacola, Florida in January 1861 were mistaken. He asked Owen to look through the records of his father's unit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Alabama Infantry. When Owen checked, he could not find the man's name in the first muster rolls for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Alabama, as he enlisted only after the war had started in April. Owen did not stop there, but his additional correspondence with other veterans of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Alabama found none who could remember the man joining at the time.<sup>26</sup>

Grace McConnell brought an entirely different request to Owen, post-scripted with an injunction to confidentiality. Her father had escaped service in the 29<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry by hiring a substitute named McKee to take his place. McKee had died in service, and might have been forgotten except "my father had a talk with my sister and me some years ago, in reference to doing something for a relative of his...a substitute." McConnell knew McKee's age, hometown, and place of death, and wanted Owen only to confirm these facts. She had a few other related questions, however. "How soon did the news of the death of soldiers go back to their homes and neighbors?" McConnell asked, perhaps imagining the fog of war that descended on McKee's family once he joined the army. Then there was the question of substitutes' pay. Her father had given McKee money, but she did not know the amount; "Do the records show

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<sup>25</sup>"An Unsung Heroine," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 16, 1972.

<sup>26</sup>Col. F. G. Coffey to Owen, March 8, 1909, Owen to Coffey, March 10, 1909, Lectures, Travel, and Speeches, SG017880, AF-TO, ADAH.

anything about the financial arrangement between Mr. McKee and my father?” For that matter, “How much was a substitute [generally] paid by the man for whom he sent?” McConnell further wondered just how much McKee’s bounty was worth after runaway Confederate inflation was through with it. “What was the value of Confederate or Ala. State money about August, 1864?,” she inquired, “...how much [was] Alabama State money...worth as compared with Confederate money, and Northern money...near the end of the war, or after the war had ended?” Owen replied with a list of survivors from the 29<sup>th</sup> Alabama whom McConnell might contact, a sheet of comparative prices for certain Confederate goods, and a refund of the money she had enclosed.<sup>27</sup>

As the administrative files show, many general information and service requests besides pension matters ended up in the ADAH mailbox. Ex-Confederate staff officer James Gilmer asked Owen if Alabama’s government would grant pensions to “faithful Negro servants,” as Mississippi had done years earlier, and specifically whether Owen had heard from Gilmer’s former servant, Henry Taylor. A woman in Ohio wanted contact information for the family of a soldier in the 13<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, that she might return to them his hand-labeled canteen. Reverend N. G. Augustus related a folk tale that Alabama fire-eater William Yancey’s father had been “a Yankey [sic] Presbyterian preacher who came south to teach school...sold the family slaves, put the money in his pocket, and went north.” He wondered whether Owen thought that “this...was the starting point of Yancey’s fiery zeal.” Owen, familiar with Yancey’s life, labeled the story false. University of Arkansas professor David Thomas meanwhile was curious about certain characteristics for each of Alabama’s delegates to the 1860 Democratic convention that had split the party and precipitated Lincoln’s electoral victory---“His occupation,” “Number of

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<sup>27</sup>Grace E. McConnell to Owen, March 28, 1917, Owen to McConnell, April 21, 1917, Inquiries, Confederate, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

slaves he owned,” and “Previous political affiliations.” Owen gave a UDC woman serving at a Kentucky Confederate soldiers’ home a list of all Bluegrass men who had fought in Alabama units. One particularly unusual request was that of a Tennessee klavern of the Ku Klux Klan, on the organization’s letterhead no less, for a copy of the first Klan ritual and oath.<sup>28</sup>

Some of Owen’s other correspondents simply wanted names of the living. A New Yorker asked “What Southern generals or officers of large importance, who saw service in the battle[s] of Chattanooga and...Chickamauga, are still surviving?...you might suggest from your records five or six who are of public interest.” Virginia Drake requested contact information for all surviving Confederate congressman from the first session in 1861, so that she might ask them when they had accepted the first Confederate flag design. Monroe Work, Owen’s counterpart down the road at the Tuskegee Institute Department of Records and Research, briefly turned the director’s attention to an anti-Confederate memory of the turbulent 1860s. Work asked for a list of African-American state legislators during Reconstruction. Owen pointed Work to a textbook where he could find the names, noting in passing that three of the men listed were not actually black.<sup>29</sup>

Owen too frequently answered questions about the best books for certain topics. To a newspaper editor from Brewton seeking accounts on Alabamians’ roles in the 1860 Democratic conventions, Owen recommended William Garrett’s hefty *Reminiscences of Public Men in*

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<sup>28</sup>Col. J. N. Gilmer to Owen, September 21, 1916, Correspondence, SG016701, AF-TO, ADAH; *Fort Payne Journal*, April 8, 1914; N. G. Augustus to Owen, January 11, 1907, Correspondence, SG016704, AF-TO, ADAH; David Y. Thomas to Owen, October 29, 1910, Correspondence, SG016701, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen to Miss Florence Barlow, August 15, 1910, Soveren Klan of the Herald to Owen, April 23, 1919, Correspondence, SG016702, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>29</sup>Montrose J. Moses to Owen, February 14, 1913, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen to Nora J. Nelson, April 24, 1917, Virginia Drake to Owen, March 3, 1914, Monroe N. Work to Owen, September 25, 1916, Owen to Work, September 26, 1916, Requests for Information, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH.

*Alabama* (1872), William Russell Smith's *History and Debates*, and John W. DuBose's biography of William Yancey. These three titles, in fact, were in Owen's own bibliography, and he recommended them and the bibliography too in numerous discussions of reading lists. To a man in New Decatur interested in the story of Union General Abel Streight's 1863 "mule raid" across northern Alabama, Owen recommended Confederate veteran John A. Wyeth's *Life of Lieutenant-General Nathan Bedford Forrest* (1899). He suggested to a state legislator searching for "some information" about "bonds...issued in the time of Republican rule of the State" that Walter Fleming's *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (1905) and Hilary Herbert's chapter in *Why the Solid South?* (1890) would give the best answers. On the subject of white Southerners who had fought in the Union Army, Owen noted to a librarian that Charles C. Anderson's *Fighting By Southern Federals* (1912) was worth a look, although when it came to the numerical strength of southern Tories, "I am not prepared to advise you as to the accuracy of [his] estimates."<sup>30</sup>

Although Owen's reading lists centered on political and military tomes, some of his responses indicate a passing familiarity with other books. New Yorker Louise Humphrey drew a different reading list from Owen when she requested background literature for a prize paper on white southern women's wartime lives. Humphrey made clear that she was not looking for the usual moonlight-and-magnolias fluff written for the popular market, no "soft sobs and faded roses. I am trying hard to bring the subject down out of the nebulous [realm] of unauthentic romance that seems to surround it," she told Owen. "I would like to get more of plantation

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<sup>30</sup>H. C. Rankin to Owen, November 16, 1901, Owen to Rankin, November 23, 1901, Correspondence, SG016700, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen to Eugene C. Justice, December 10, 1915, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH; Owen to Hon. F. M. Jackson, March 30, 1915, Owen to Lloyd W. Josselyn, March 20, 1915, Requests for Information, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH.

conditions & less of stricken lovers and [would] be glad if I could get something...about the classes inside the slave-owning aristocracy – their attitudes...during the Struggle.” Owen steered Humphrey towards Susan Dabney Marshall’s *Memories of a Southern Planter* (1887), Daniel Hundley’s *Social Relations in our Southern States* (1860), and J. L. Underwood’s *The Women of the Confederacy* (1906).<sup>31</sup>

Besides general information requests, Owen aided public school programs and heritage associations. An Atlanta man sounded Owen out about composing one- to five-hundred-word historical sketches on Confederate icons Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and “Stonewall” Jackson for a grade-school level Confederate history pamphlet. Another Atlanta resident, writing on behalf of a family guest enrolled in a school competition, asked for and received a list of dates and names for the most important Civil War battles fought in Georgia. Noting a paucity of material on female spies in the war, Owen encouraged a UDC member who brought up the subject to “talk with the old veterans in your community, and get their recollections on the subject.” “In this way,” Owen told her, “your [chapter] talk will be really making a distinct contribution, whereas otherwise you will be merely compiling something from data already assembled.” He gave still another Daughter a list of “fighting parsons” of the Confederacy for a presentation on wartime religion.<sup>32</sup>

Those who had done some digging on their own still wanted and appreciated Owen’s help. Veteran William Taylor thanked Owen for sending information on every Confederate

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<sup>31</sup>Louise G. Humphrey to Owen, n.d., Owen to Humphrey, March 15, 1915, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>32</sup>Henry W. Laurens to Owen, September 25, 1914, Owen to Mrs. F. C. Clark, March 3, 1914, Owen to Mrs. J. H. Black, March 10, 1914, Owen to Mrs. A. C. Humphries, March 31, 1914, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

regiment with a company raised in Talladega County, in preparation for Taylor's talk at a UDC chapter. When he had stepped to the podium, he reported, to the astonishment of his listeners, had been able to rattle off the companies' officers like a sergeant calling the morning roll. Marie Reece informed Owen that she had to make a presentation to her UDC chapter on Jewish Confederate cabinet member Judah Benjamin. Reece had gleaned some basic facts about Benjamin from encyclopedias but wanted to look into his relationships with his wife and children. Something unusual would spice up her talk as well, so Reece asked if Owen could "suggest a Hebrew poem suitable for the occasion or even not appropriate" to accompany "music written by a Jewish composer to be played" during the presentation.<sup>33</sup>

Depending on his busyness and the level of the inquiries, Owen sometimes summarized basic information. Thus, Owen answered in brief a couple pages of questions from R. H. Evins:

6. Q: Who really wrote [the Confederate Constitution]? A: ...it was based largely on the Constitution of the United States, and who actually drafted it...is not known...9. Q: Whose design [for the Confederate flag] was chosen? A: This question is in controversy...15. Q: Who suggested the Gray [of Confederate uniforms]? A: It is not definitely known.

He also answered for an Alabama woman five questions about the total number of Civil War battles, the most important engagements, the commanders of Confederate military departments, the Confederate ironclad that had fought in the 1864 Battle of Mobile Bay (CSS

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<sup>33</sup>"Twenty-Six Companies," *Our Mountain Home*, September 16, 1903; Marie E. Reece to Owen, September 21, 1904, Correspondence, SG016705, AF-TO, ADAH.

*Tennessee*), and different Union Army raids across Alabama. At other times Owen must have felt like Marcus Wright when opening one of Owen's under-the-counter letters. UDC member Elizabeth Crowe's request for information on "The population of Alabama in '61 both white and negro, Production of Cotton '61-'65, Number of Slaves, Generals and Statesmen, Alabama in literary world '61-'65, Battles fought on Ala soil and what parts of State, Educational statistics, Number of universities and colleges," and "Manufacturing plants of whatever kind of importance," blithely assumed that Owen had measureless time on his hands. Owen responded to a different request for material "relating to places in Alabama associated with important events in the Civil War," with a historical sketch of the state capitol. The requestor had to narrow down this massive topic before Owen could give more.<sup>34</sup>

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Edits and revisions of manuscripts were another way Owen served the public. A competent if not eloquent stylist, familiar with scientific history writing's rules, Owen had plenty of tips and suggestions for amateur historians. He coached the nephew of a 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment veteran preparing his uncle's wartime diary for publication. "Insert foot-notes as often as is necessary," Owen instructed, and compose "a prefatory note, as well as...an introduction, the latter to embrace a sketch of the old annalist." It would not hurt to place the company muster

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<sup>34</sup>Owen to R. H. Evins, October 29, 1915, Owen to Mrs. Key Murphree, February 27, 1914, Elizabeth Crowe to Owen, March 14, 1914, Owen to Crowe, March 23, 1914, Owen to Mr. S. Demming, April 3, 1914, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH. To save himself from an excess of individual requests, Owen in 1908 considered creating a "Handbook of Confederate History," to contain useful information such as "Brief but complete sketches of (1) The President (2) The V.P. (3) All Cabinet Members (4) All Senators and Representatives (5) All General Affairs...(6) Forts and defensive works (7) Battles, engagements, skirmishes, etc., (8) Hospitals...(10) Churches (11) Railroads (12) Steamboats (13) Finance....," Memo book from 1907/03/02 to 1909/03/02 relating to the work of the ADAH, SG016717, AF-TO, ADAH.

roll after the diary pages, with an asterisk by the name of each survivor. Naturally, he added, “an index should be made by all means.”<sup>35</sup>

With historical studies, and especially textbooks, Owen dissected proofs line by line. In a summary of his revisions for a state history by former Birmingham school principal Joel Campbell DuBose, Owen told DuBose that his text was a too complex for a child’s reading level. There were also quite a few errors beyond wrong transcriptions or incorrect dates. Owen for example questioned DuBose’s assertion on page 136 of the manuscript that William Yancey had led the walkout of the Alabama delegation at the 1860 Democratic convention; after all, another southern statesman’s memoirs said differently. Owen corrected DuBose’s figures for African-Americans at the 1875 state constitutional convention (“there were five negroes”), and, interestingly, cautioned DuBose against using the phrase “ex-slave,” as he had on paragraph 6 of page 219. He should replace this phrase with “old slaves,” and while on the topic Owen added that “the prefix ‘ex’ ought never to be used...in reference to old slaves or the Confederate soldiers.” Finally, there were places where DuBose needed to explain himself rather than assume his readers understood him. For instance, on page 306, “The extent of the way in which ‘The old Confederates were liberally remembered’ should be stated,” Owen wrote<sup>36</sup>

Georgian Eliza Frances Andrews received less guidance when she sent Owen a copy of her wartime journal. Andrews was not a neophyte in the world of letters, having already

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<sup>35</sup>Owen to Thomas Hudson, May 16, 1907, Correspondence, SG016704, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>36</sup>Owen to Prof. Joel C. DuBose, November 10, 1908, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH. Finch writes that there was a tempest in a teapot over whether DuBose’s history should be an ADAH publication: “Owen...argued that the archives had no jurisdiction to authorize the official history of the state, but only to collect and make available materials for scholars...He contended there was not a need for a history at that time, but if one was to be done, it was his responsibility,” “Preserver,” 80-81.

published a novel, *A Family Secret* (1876). For her journal she wanted the widest possible readership, which meant avoiding unnecessary controversy:

I ask of you to read it over and criticize with a view to the following points: ...2. Anything that might be displeasing to persons now living. 3. Things that might possibly give offense to Southern readers in general. 4. Things that might justly prove offensive to Northern readers. 5. Suggest additional notes or explanations...7. Any passages that might be seen in questionable taste.

After a brief perusal of the manuscript Owen said he had nothing in the way of constructive criticism. “As a picture, it is vivid and spirited,” Owen admitted, “and herein lies its value.” Andrews’ accompanying illustrations were a nice touch too. That was all Owen had to say. Very likely Andrews found another, forthright editor before her journal went to print as the now-celebrated *Wartime Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865* (1908).<sup>37</sup>

Owen’s editorial reticence towards Eliza Andrews may have been due to her project as well as her gender. Biographies were closer to Owen’s interests and abilities than ladies’ journals, so when Margaret Sims sent Owen her prospective magazine article on Confederate cavalry leader Earl Van Dorn she got a full, candid critique. Owen told Sims not to mix up past and present tenses, not to use the word “led” excessively, and especially not to bloat the draft with extensive excerpts from primary sources. “I think that you introduce too many documents

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<sup>37</sup>Eliza F. Andrews to Owen, February 14, 1907, Owen to Andrews, February 15, 1907 and September 29, 1908, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

at length,” Owen wrote. “While these documents are historically valuable, I think that they ought to be condensed in the briefest possible space.” Nor should Sims’ chapters begin with block quotes. Finally, Sims’ judgment that Van Dorn was “the greatest Cavalry leader of his time” was not true. Owen warned her that “While you may be entitled personally to that opinion, I think that its use will be subject to criticism, certainly from the friends of Generals [J. E. B.] Stuart, [John Hunt] Morgan, [Wade] Hampton, [Joseph] Wheeler, and [Nathan Bedford] Forrest.”<sup>38</sup> Owen left it up to Sims whether to withdraw the claim entirely or to argue it out, in which case she needed to address the views of her opponents.

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These letters in Owen’s administrative files demonstrate a steady level of written access to the archives. Physical access is harder to gauge, for Owen did not consistently record visitations. The only evidential sources for people going to the archives are a few newspaper notices and Owen’s journals. By their nature, both sources are more anecdotal than comprehensive. The *Montgomery Times* reported on October 27, 1909, that more than 200 people from eleven different states had visited the ADAH over the past two days, based on a department register. Nine years later, in the bustle of American mobilization for the First World War, the *Montgomery Advertiser* reported that up to 20,000 men from Ohio national guard units had visited the archive as part of a group photo-shoot on the spot of Jefferson Davis’ inauguration. Obviously, this visit was an extraordinary circumstance. Without the shipment of armed men to southern training camps, visitors from Ohio or any other state would probably not

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<sup>38</sup>Margaret D. Sims to Owen, April 20, 1909, Owen to Sims, July 19, 1909, Encouragement of Historical Work, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH. Owen pointedly named no ex-Federals to his list of great horsemen.

have been as numerous. All the same, of the two groups of visitors the second was specifically interested in the archives' Civil War connection.<sup>39</sup>

While director Owen also filled in a couple journals covering most of a twenty-four-month period. As might be expected, the entries are fuller on days when Owen travelled, met with politicians, or made speeches. The routine of office work merited less description. October 18, 1905 for example found Owen "At office" attending to "Sundry office activities, cleaning, arranging papers, etc." Months passed before Owen talked about his work again. On August 16, 1907 he was "sorting and arranging war papers in vertical files" and beginning to believe that "the vertical correspondence...files best system yet devised." August 17 and 26 Owen devoted to filing Civil War-related correspondence, a task to which he returned on September 12. Owen spent September 2 working on the *Official and Statistical Register* and September 6 sorting the archives of the governor's office.<sup>40</sup>

Drop-ins interrupting his working days always got Owen's attention. Walter Fleming stopped by on September 5, 1907 to chat with Owen and look through the newspaper files. Auburn history professor George Petrie came on September 13 to discuss a book project. Tax assessors consulted with Owen on the Confederate census a few days after Petrie's visit. Twice in his journal Owen noted an unusually large number of regular visitors to the ADAH. On May 6, 1906 he met with "Many callers owing to high school contests." The following October Owen

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<sup>39</sup>"Record of Visitors," *Montgomery Times*, October 27, 1909; "Alabama Museum Attracts Troops," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 25, 1918. United States Army orders to keep all men in their camps soon ended the doughboys' visits to the ADAH, "Fewer Visits," *Montgomery Times*, November 25, 1918. Owen must have given the newspaper this information, though his reasons for doing so are unclear. He might have judged the number worth reporting because unusually high, he might have wanted to show Alabamians that out-of-state visitors cared about their history, or he might have wanted to prove that his underfunded department was running smoothly.

<sup>40</sup>Journals, 1905-1908, 1912, Owen papers, ADAH.

noted that “Numbers of visitors are in the hall all during the day,” probably because there was “much in interest in the Confed. soldiers census.”<sup>41</sup>

The director was sure that his department would have had more satisfied regular visitors in its early years if it had had a proper place to receive them. Initially happy to be headquartered in an annex of the Alabama Senate, Owen soon complained that the legislators were constantly underfoot. At times Owen’s legislative allies took up space. At others, as during full or special sessions, they forced him to relocate to other offices in the capitol. Normally the larger legislative sessions would have been beneficial, for “large numbers of gentlemen and visitors come here...who never do come otherwise.” Unfortunately Owen could hardly ever welcome visitors or give them a tour because his office was elsewhere and his desk was the only piece of furniture. “Instead of having a place where our treasures can be displayed,” Owen regretted, “they are stored away.” Worse still, “numbers...have appealed to information, for data, for help, to examine our collections, to which appeals I could not respond.”<sup>42</sup>

Owen demanded more support from the state government, in the form of extra money and expanded offices and storage facilities. That support came glacially. After the department was established, nearly two years passed before the legislature increased the maintenance fund from \$700 to \$2,500. Until February, 1907 Owen’s salary was set at \$1,800. There were no furnishings or equipment grants until August of the same year, when Owen received \$2,000 earmarked for that purpose. The next month’s renovations in the capitol were supposed to

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1903,” 2, Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH; Governor’s Office to Owen, April 27, 1903, Quarters (Building), SG016720, AF-TO, ADAH; “Archives Department Is Doing Much Work,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 2, 1914. The dimensions of Owen’s office in the Senate cloak room are unknown, e-mail, Lisa K. Franklin, Site Director, Alabama State Capitol, Alabama Historical Commission, to Daniel E. Cone, April 16, 2020.

contribute “much money” to the archives.<sup>43</sup> Although better-supported than before, the ADAH remained a budgetary stepchild of Alabama’s government.

Owen’s press patrons said less on his behalf when he was begging for money than they had when he was getting started. The *Montgomery Times* did run an editorial in 1904 which castigated the legislature for its “niggardly” contributions to the department and asserted that Owen should have his own archival building. Also, a piece in the *Mobile Register* reprinted in the *Montgomery Advertiser* weighed the government’s penny-pinching in the scales against the encomiums of outsiders. “While all over the country...the Alabama plan of preserving the public records is imitated,” the writer remarked, “there are members of the Legislature who ask what is the good of archives, anyway, and why encumber the earth with musty records of the past?” Such questions showed a staggering level of ignorance, to which “We hardly know how to reply...It is as if we were asked what is the good of history, or to explain the value of the printing press.” The single greatest proof of the ADAH’s value moreover was its diligent work gathering Alabama’s Confederate records. Thousands of veterans were doing better because of the department’s initiative, along with hundreds of history students and scores of instructors, “Yet ther[e] be men who would consign the whole collection...to the rubbish heap.” As there is no evidence that the government ever considered shutting down the archives, the *Register* was implying that underfunding was equivalent to disestablishment. “We want to see that department

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<sup>43</sup>William D. Jelks to Owen, January 11, 1907, Quarters (Building), SG016720, AF-TO, ADAH; “Items in the History and Administration of the Department,” Memorandum Book No. 1 “Personal” – History, SG030088, AF-TO, ADAH; “Fixing House At Capitol,” *Montgomery Times*, September 27, 1907; “To Strengthen Department,” *Rockford Chronicle*, December 23, 1910.

adequately provided for and its [director] properly paid,” the *Register* concluded. Owen carefully preserved these and similar expressions of support.<sup>44</sup>

Retired Montgomery businessman Jesse D. Beale, on the other hand, thought that Owen and the ADAH had sufficient funds. In fact, Beale was convinced the director and his department got more than they were supposed to get from the enabling legislation. He filed a restraining order against Owen, the state auditor, and the state treasurer in September 1904 for overdrawing. The retiree’s suit related to the \$700 contingency fund set up in Bill no. 476 to cover department expenses. That fund was a one-time gift, Beale averred, but the department had continued to collect the amount plus its regular funds for the following three years. “Surprised,” Owen fought back. He filed a counter injunction claiming that Beale had no right to sue because he was not a taxpayer, and that the \$700 was always intended to be a regular, per annum grant. Beale replied by submitting documents in proof of his taxpaying status, and ultimately a federal judge ruled against Owen and the government. Satisfied with his victory, Beale hastened to assure everyone that he was not against the state archives: “I think it is a good thing and I want it continued under certain conditions...I simply exercised my right as a citizen and a taxpayer to petition the court to stop it...drawing money from the treasury and expending it without authority of law.” Owen in turn sniffed, “This is merely a construction of law...We will appeal.” When he did, the appellate court shot him down, leaving the department, in the view of the *Montgomery Times*, “crippled for the time being.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>“Alabama Archives,” *Montgomery Times*, July 27, 1904; “Archives and History,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 12, 1907. Praise of and congratulations to Owen take up the greater part of Record Group SG01669, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>45</sup>“J. D. Beale Files A Bill,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 29, 1904; “Beale Not A Tax Payer,” October 27, 1904; “J. D. Beale Gains Point,” December 14, 1904; “Loses \$700 In Money For Expenses,” *Montgomery Times*,

Personal loss came hard on the heels of institutional loss. On March 6, 1906, the Owens' Montgomery home caught fire from a faulty electrical wire. The Owens and their children were elsewhere and escaped harm, but within half an hour nothing remained of the house but a smoking shell. Owen lost more than a home; he lost his entire personal library and uncounted manuscript documents. "Among the most valuable works that were destroyed," the *Montgomery Advertiser* reported, "were Dr. Owen's unpublished histories" of several Alabama counties, "his records of the Sons of the Revolution," USCV records, "all of his Confederate war papers," the entire paper collection of one of Alabama's first congressional representatives, and genealogical data "on the lives of over 5,000 public characters in the history of Alabama."<sup>46</sup>

A collector's house filled with old papers, suddenly consumed by flames---it was the ever-present nightmare of archival preservationists. The *Advertiser* found it bitterly ironic that "the fire should have originated and burned more fiercely in the precious library of the historian [where] there was absolutely no chance to save any of the contents." The *Greenville Advocate* expressed relief that accessioned ADAH documents had not been in the house. It fell to a North Carolina newspaper to draw the practical lesson. In a short piece reprinted by the *Advertiser*, the *Charlotte Observer*, while deeply sympathetic with Owen's loss, took the occasion to prod the state government to invest in fire-proof libraries and repositories for its bureaus. Although neither Owen nor the Alabama press publicly echoed the *Observer's* point, it cannot have been

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January 8, 1906. Beale's suit was the only legal challenge the ADAH faced during Owen's time as director. The next newspaper notice regarding the department's expenses was its successful state audit four years later, "Dr. Owen's Books Found Correct," *Cullman Tribute*, September 16, 1909. It passed again in 1914, "Dr. Owens Work Warmly Praised," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 15, 1914.

<sup>46</sup>"Records of Priceless Value Destroyed By Fire," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 7, 1906.

coincidental that the legislature expanded and renovated the capitol later that year, nor that Owen was secretary of the building commission.<sup>47</sup>

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We can safely say that Owen made his archives accessible. Considering white Southerners' anger at having limited access to the captured Confederate archives---an anger Owen was aware of and personally shared---Owen really had no other choice. Moreover, Owen was definitely not a Frederick Ainsworth type. Outgoing and knowledgeable, he genuinely wanted to be available to Alabamians, with the sad and inexplicable exception of Juliet Opie Ayres.

Those who wrote to Owen and visited the ADAH's cramped office and storage rooms must have sensed this. ADAH users and visitors expressed confidence that Owen knew almost everything about the Civil War era. Whatever the director did not know offhand, he could surely find out with the turn of a file cabinet key. It mattered little to Owen's supporters that some who accessed the archives turned up nothing, like the federal government official who came searching for Mississippi's antebellum federal court records. "Yankees" like that did not really want to find in southern archives the things they were supposedly looking for, because if they found

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.; *Greenville Advocate*, March 14, 1906; "Should Provide Fire-Proof Building," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 31, 1906; "Pushing Work On The State House," *Anniston Star*, December 14, 1906. By 1910 the department had some "fireproof rooms," Owen to Camp Raphael Semmes, October 10, 1910, United Confederate Veterans, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

them, they might have to alter their stubbornly fallacious views about southern administrative incompetence.<sup>48</sup>

AHS member Kate Hutcheson Morrisette for one asserted that northern businessman John Brisben Walker's article "The Education of the World" could have used a little archival research in the South, and a little historical-mindedness. The *Cosmopolitan* piece had astounded Morrisette with its misstatements and outright falsifications about southern education. Clearly Walker had decided on his thesis first, then found the evidence to support it. Morrisette answered Walker with a barrage of data-based counterpoints carefully selected from Owen's state statistical registers and other published works. She did not deny Walker's general charge that education lagged below the Mason-Dixon line, but censured Walker for not taking into account social context. There had been a terrible war, Morrisette reminded Walker, which the South had lost, followed by a disastrous and penurious peace. Emancipation had produced sloth amongst African-Americans, as white Southerners had anticipated, and their incurable laziness sapped educational progress as well as economic progress. Convinced that she saw the South's situation rightly, Morrisette proposed that Walker and other northern education reformers should thumb through a few southern histories approved by the ADAH; then they might understand how little they actually understood.<sup>49</sup>

Owen would have agreed with the thrust of Morrisette's editorial: right policy depended on right history, which in turn depended on right research. And as it happened, a number of

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<sup>48</sup>"Federal Court Records," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 13, 1904.

<sup>49</sup>*Montgomery Advertiser*, October 10, 1904.

scholars, with ambitious Civil War projects in mind, were even then rummaging through the files of the Alabama archives.

## 7. Research in the Early ADAH: Students, Scholars, and Professors

If acquisitions were Thomas Owen's directorial priority, that did not mean that he was indifferent about whether anyone used what he collected. For every record Owen foresaw a potential use. Paper collections for Alabama Confederate units undergirded pension applications and created frameworks for narrative histories. Books and pamphlets on Alabama history offered information to the archives' regular visitors and users. And other collections, published and unpublished, would inform the research of history students, scholars, and professors.

Academic researchers had been waiting for the ADAH to open. "I take pleasure in saying," Owen told the board in 1901, "that already we have been of material assistance to several persons investigating particular fields of Alabama history." Scarcely a year passed without professionals coming to Montgomery to look through the department's basement storage rooms. During 1902, Owen reported, "Miss Emma Beall Culver...consulted sundry old papers and files [for] a study of the life...of [Civil War governor] Thomas H. Watts." In 1904, "a Financial history of Alabama, [was]... prepared by W. C. Scroggs, a graduate student at the Ala[bama] Pol[YTECHNIC] Ins[titute]," while two years later, "Mr. John C. Reed has...been engaged in the preparation of an elaborate paper, in which he explodes very effectively the charge made against the South that...secession [was] largely prompted by the desire...for...reopening of the slave trade." In 1911, "Theodore H. Jack, Prof. of History and Political Science in the Southern University at Greensboro, spent several weeks in the department, engaged in researches in the history of the opposition movement to the Democratic

party.”<sup>1</sup> Owen steered these researchers to the right records, but the director’s correspondence does not show his handiwork in each case. Fortunately, we do have such letters between Owen and a handful of professional historians. An examination of Owen’s letters to four significant historians, Frederic Bancroft, Walter Fleming, George Petrie, and Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, as well as to Petrie’s students, demonstrates much about his work as an archivist.

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The archives’ library and unprinted collections contained plenty of material for college and university students’ papers. This was a particular boon to students at the nearby Alabama Polytechnic Institute (API), already known informally as Auburn.<sup>2</sup> For one thing, the archives were only a few hours distant by train. Moreover, at least one member of API’s faculty enjoyed a close personal and professional relationship with Owen. Professor George Petrie, the founder of both the college’s history department and more famously the Tigers football team, was a contemporary of the archivist, born eight months before him in Montgomery. A graduate of the University of Virginia and an 1891 Johns Hopkins graduate, Petrie embraced the scientific history and seminar method he learned in Baltimore. He joined the AHS soon after Owen revitalized it, although his name is missing from the society’s first few circulars, and also established a historical society in Auburn. Petrie strongly believed the Alabama History Commission and the ADAH were worth funding, and he marshaled the college in support of the

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<sup>1</sup>“Minutes and Annual Reports, 1902,” n. p., “Minutes and Annual Report, 1904,” 18, “Minutes and Annual Report, 1906,” n. p., “Minutes and Annual Report, 1911, n. p.,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

<sup>2</sup> Founded as a private college in 1856, the institution became a Land Grant college after the Civil War. It existed as API from 1899 until 1960, when it officially became Auburn University, but students informally had called it “Auburn” for decades, “The History,” Auburn University, last updated September 14, 2016, accessed April 17, 2020, <http://www.auburn.edu/main/welcome/aboutauburn.php>.

legislative bills creating them. “It is very seldom that our faculty takes any action of this kind with regard to a matter before the legislature,” Petrie admitted to Owen, “so I think we ought to feel gratified at their present conduct.” Besides their common affinity for intellectual matters, the two men ran in the same social circles.<sup>3</sup>

Petrie the professional had a high estimation of Owen the amateur scholar. He often asked Owen to review his students’ papers because “a man like yourself...knows what historical research means.” At least once, Petrie advised Owen not to sound too academic when he gave a public presentation on Alabama history at Auburn. “Your audience,” Petrie reminded the archivist on that occasion, “as a whole...could not be expected to know much history and it would be well to [make a] popular talk...not too technical.” Because of their good relationship Petrie regularly encouraged his students to consult with the archivist on their projects.<sup>4</sup>

The Petrie Papers at Auburn University offer a closer look at what Petrie’s students researched. There are 91 student papers for history in the collection, running the gamut of topics from Russian peasants and Mexican peonage, to Woodrow Wilson’s foreign policies and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, to the Marquis de Lafayette’s 1825 American tour and the life of colonial Virginian planter William Byrd. Fifty-six student papers cover topics from Alabama history, although surprisingly of this number antebellum, wartime, and Reconstruction topics amount to less than half the total. Another half-dozen papers cover other general topics between 1850 and 1877.

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<sup>3</sup>Anthony Donaldson, “George Petrie,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, May 4, 2010, accessed March 2, 2020, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2578>; Petrie to Owen, January 18, 1901, Correspondence, Series 3, George Petrie Papers, RG192, Special Collections, Auburn University.

<sup>4</sup>Petrie to Owen, October 10, 1901 and May 21, 1904, Petrie Papers; Petrie to Owen, March 6, 1912, W. S. Childs to Owen, January 31, 1910, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

Owen's hand is evident in at least a couple of those papers. William Bowen Henderson and F. P. Samford's joint paper, "The Alabama State Constitutional Convention of 1865," expressly thanked Owen for "his collection of the lives of the members of the different State conventions...never [before] published." Henderson and Samford cited it several times. The two students used Owen's collection blandly, ticking off two- or three-sentence paragraphs of the political backgrounds of each convention member one by one. John V. Denson probably shaped his "Slavery Laws in Alabama"---which Petrie later printed as a model for the university's Historical Studies series---from law code volumes and legal expertise contributed by lawyer-archivist Owen. Denson's decision "not...to discuss at all the [actual] administration of the laws nor the conditions resulting from any maladministration of them" made it easier for him to claim that Alabama's antebellum legal system was "never cruel and never overstepped the bounds of conservative measures."<sup>5</sup>

Petrie kept Owen informed on his research and field work on slavery, and borrowed books and copies of manuscript materials from the archives. That Petrie did not always tell Owen where his students were focusing their research, however, is indicated by letters between Owen and John B. Clark, one of U. B. Phillips' students at Harvard in early 1913. Clark wanted Owen's help narrowing down a topic for his dissertation. "What about [the] History of the Whig Party in Alabama?" Clark asked. "What material can be had upon this subject?" Alternatively, "Is it possible to work up some subject connected with slavery in Alabama?" By that time, several Petrie students had submitted papers on slavery, while Petrie and some others were gathering materials. Yet all Owen told Clark was that if he did not want to write on "The

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<sup>5</sup>William Bowen Henderson & F. P. Samford, "The Alabama State Constitutional Convention of 1865" (n.d.), 11, Student Papers, Petrie Papers, Special Collections, Auburn University; John V. Denson, *Alabama Polytechnic Historical Studies, Third Series - Slavery Laws in Alabama* (Auburn: 1908), 1, 7, 14.

genesis and growth of Union sentiment in Alabama” or ““History of Alabama agriculture,”” he could write ““The history of slavery in Alabama.””<sup>6</sup>

Owen not surprisingly seemed more comfortable helping scholars who knew what they wanted to write about and what sources they wanted to explore. Petrie, while interested in slavery, remained preoccupied with the Alabama fire-eater William L. Yancey. Entire boxes of Petrie’s papers at Auburn document his affection for, research on, and scattered writings about the no-holds-barred southern statesmen. Petrie’s enthrallment was not unusual, for Yancey was a popular figure amongst early twentieth-century white Alabamians. Owen’s office assistant, John W. DuBose, worked up a comprehensive if tedious Yancey biography published posthumously. As another chapter will show, even Owen attempted to cash in on Yancey fever. Petrie nevertheless was Yancey’s biggest devotee. Fewer than three months after Owen had moved to the capitol, Petrie was champing at the bit to look through the department’s recently-acquired collection of Yancey’s papers. “If you can let me have access to that material,” Petrie pleaded, “it will enable me to judge at first hand of many matters about which otherwise I shall have to rely on second hand evidence.” The professor estimated that with these materials he could “see...pretty clearly to a medium sized, critical life of Yancey which will be popular in style and price without sacrificing either accuracy or a liberal minded fairness to those who differed from him.” Owen gave Petrie full reign over the Yancey papers. Petrie notoriously

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<sup>6</sup>Petrie to Owen, February 25, 1905 and July 10, 1906, Petrie, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH; U. B. Phillips to Owen, December 19, 1902, John B. Clark to Owen, February 12, 1913, Owen to Clark, March 4, 1913, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO-ADAH.

never converted his collections into the biography he had planned, but he did at least pen an analysis of Yancey for the *Transactions*.<sup>7</sup>

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Frederic Bancroft and U. B. Phillips were perfectly clear about their research interests and needs when they contacted Owen. Bancroft had already written *A Sketch of the Negro in Politics, especially in South Carolina and Mississippi* (1885) and a two-volume biography of William Henry Seward. Referred by AHA co-founder and *American Historical Review* editor J. Franklin Jameson, Bancroft explained that now he was “engaged in writing a history of life in the South from 1860 to 1865.” Bancroft planned to visit several southern record-collecting centers, although not specifically the ADAH. Apart from gathering “ample...printed material,” Bancroft wanted access to unpublished papers. He was “especially anxious to find private correspondence descriptive of life in the Confederate army and on the plantations.” Interviews would be welcome sources of information as well, for Bancroft wanted to “get by observation and conversation as vivid an idea as possible of how things looked and what people thought and said during the war.” In Bancroft’s view, Owen was not so much an archivist as a point man. “If you think of any persons that could and probably would be willing to aid me in my

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<sup>7</sup>Petrie to Owen, June 12, 1901 and July 10, 1906, Petrie, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH; John W. DuBose, *The life and times of William Lowndes Yancey: A history of political parties in the United States, from 1834 to 1864; especially as to the origin of the Confederate states* (New York: Peter Smith, 1942); Eric H. Walther, “A Monument of Paper for William Lowndes Yancey: Crafting and Obscuring Historical Memory,” in Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed., *The Enigmatic South: Toward Civil War and its Legacies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 198-220.

researches,” Bancroft promised, “I shall be under great obligations if you will give me their names.”<sup>8</sup> If Owen rendered Bancroft any assistance, there are no letters to prove it.

The Georgian Phillips probably would have been happy to hear of Bancroft’s setback. He and his Illinois-born scholarly adversary had nothing in common but doctorates from Columbia and a mutual contempt for each other’s work. Blue-blooded Bancroft looked down his nose at Phillips’ lower-class upbringing and labeled his scholarship so much racist tripe, while envying Phillips’ prestige in the AHA and greater publishing success. Phillips returned the intense dislike with interest, waving off Bancroft’s bad reviews of his work as sour grapes from a disgruntled wannabe. Over the long term, as historian John David Smith has noted, Bancroft came out on top. Although both men held questionable social and racial views by today’s lights, Bancroft at least was aware that he was prejudiced. Phillips, on the other hand, was too smug, successful, and self-assured to recognize that his published defenses of slavery might not be everyone’s cup of tea, or that moral arc of the academy might ever bend against him. As professional historians have begun to recognize the institutionalized racism of their line of work, they have snatched back the ill-awarded crowns of past scholars like Phillips. Phillips’ longer list of publications has generally doubled the condemnation liberal-minded scholars have heaped on his head.<sup>9</sup>

Yet as Smith maintains, Phillips truly established the academic study of slavery. Phillips was more thorough and wide-ranging in his use of primary sources than were many scholars of

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<sup>8</sup>Frederic A. Bancroft, *A Sketch of the Negro in Politics, Especially in South Carolina and Mississippi* (New York: J. F. Pearson, 1895); Bancroft, *The Life of William H. Seward*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900); Frederic Bancroft to Owen, March 3, 1902, Correspondence A-W, SG016698, AF-TO, ADAH; Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History*.

<sup>9</sup>Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History*.

his time, and more than quite a few since. Moreover, Phillips' approach has become the standard for present-day studies of slavery. Smith reminds us that scholars continually seek to explain, as Phillips did, how slavery affected African-Americans; they emulate his comparisons of slave societies temporally and spatially in specialized monographs; and like Phillips, they frame slavery not as a rigid structure built on can's and can not's, but rather as a feedback loop of re-negotiations of power between the slave-holding and the enslaved.<sup>10</sup>

Phillips was a freshly-minted PhD, years away from researching his magisterial *American Negro Slavery* (1918), when he first wrote to Owen. Lecture responsibilities at the University of Wisconsin were taking up most of Phillips' time, and he had not yet settled on what would become his next project, *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860* (1908). Consequently Phillips did not ask for manuscript or printed materials from Owen; he only wanted a picture or two of southern "dog-trot" cabins "to illustrate a lecture...on the development of architecture in the antebellum South." In case Owen did not have pictures of dog-trots, Phillips helpfully added that he remembered seeing such cabins along the line of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad between Montgomery and Prattville. A quick day trip by the director or his assistants, armed with a camera, surely would do the trick. The following month, Phillips asked for more pictures for slides "showing the improved condition of Southern agriculture today, especially as to cotton fields, terraced and drained fields, new barns and silos, fine hogs, poultry [and] cattle."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>U. B. Phillips to Owen, November 7 and December 2, 1903, U. B. Phillips, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

Phillips wrote his last known letter to the director in 1912. Free by then to start researching *American Negro Slavery*, Phillips informed Owen that “in my study of the efficiency and cost of negro labor under various conditions I need data as to the ratio of wages which the Southern states leasing their convicts have obtained for them in recent years.” He also inquired as to whether Owen “can...have me supplied, at my expense, with these data for Alabama for each year – the contract conditions of employment and rate of wages – since 1900?”<sup>12</sup>

Owen, as expected, helped Phillips with the pictures and the data, and later loaned him a copy of William A. Smith’s *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery* (1856). But Phillips overstepped when he invited Owen to present at a conference on “research in antebellum Southern history.” The conference’s theme would be “The Control Exerted by the Plantation Interest,” and Phillips was certain that Owen could contribute something meaningful on either “1. the economic predominance of the plantation” or “2. the grip of the planters upon state and federal governments.” Phillips was not asking for an original paper from Owen, he added, he wanted the director to summarize the historiography. “Now please take your choice of the...two topics,” Phillips urged Owen, “and in due season prepare to discuss the problems and projects of research in that connection.”<sup>13</sup>

The director kindly but firmly begged off. He was too busy to go to the conference, and besides, neither of Phillips’ topics was in his area of interest. He had never researched plantations’ economic dominance or planters’ political influence, and could not say where scholarship stood in either field. “I think,” Owen offered, “you ought to get on the program only

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<sup>12</sup>Phillips to Owen, December 19, 1912, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>13</sup>Phillips to Owen, July 18, 1908, Owen to Phillips, January 25, 1909, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

those who have actually been engaged in work in the particular subject under discussion.” If Phillips could slightly alter the theme to include “discussing sources, materials, etc., etc.” or “features of practical research,” then Owen would have something to say; otherwise, he would be out of his depth. Phillips obligingly dropped Owen from the roster of presenters.<sup>14</sup> Still, it says something about Owen’s stature amongst academics that Phillips believed he as an archivist could hold forth convincingly before men who spent their entire lives practicing history. Likely, few if any archivists today would be so honored by their scholarly peers.

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Bancroft and Phillips made limited requests of Owen’s time and resources. Walter Lynwood Fleming by contrast mined the ADAH for his major research projects. Fleming was an Alabama native, the son of a cotton planter and former Confederate soldier, and a former Petrie graduate student who had gone on to teach and work in the library at API before serving in an Alabama unit during the Spanish-American War. He entered the doctoral program at Columbia in 1900 to study under Professor William Archibald Dunning just as Phillips had done; the two briefly overlapped. Along with a half dozen other PhD candidates from the South and the Midwest, Fleming became one of Dunning’s protégés, expanding on his mentor’s work on the years of civil war and post-bellum occupation of the South.<sup>15</sup>

With the publication of his dissertation as *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, Fleming established himself as a charter member of the “Dunning School,” the first professional

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<sup>14</sup> Owen to Phillips, July 22, 1908, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>15</sup>Michael W. Fitzgerald, “The Steel Frame of Walter Lynwood Fleming,” in John David Smith & J. Vincent Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2013), 157-178.

academic cohort to apply scientific history's principles to the state-level study of Reconstruction. That cohort interpreted Reconstruction as a fool's errand at best and a shameful piece of tyranny at worst, engineered by greedy, malicious white Northerners ("carpetbaggers"), aided and abetted by dirt-poor, uneducated, turn-coat white Southerners ("scalawags") and free-born and emancipated African-Americans. While they had nothing kind to say about the first two groups, Dunning's scholars positively excoriated the third. African-American men helping the occupiers could be characterized as gullible and easily-duped by their white betters, if that best served the scholar's argument, or else as sagacious, salacious, and corrupt, especially if they saw the chance to snatch white southern men's property or social status, or white southern women's flesh. No southern government run by an alliance of the mendacious, the stupid, and the evil could have lasted for long, the Dunning School agreed. It was therefore unsurprising that Reconstruction governments had ultimately collapsed---with a big assist, and a boot on the way out, from noble, wrathful white southern manhood. Redeemed from its foreign despoilers, the South was now a white man's land run by its native white sons, as it would (rightfully) remain.<sup>16</sup>

Analytically, Fleming became a more implacable son of the South than his mentor as he began turning his dissertation into a book. Dunning himself held a pro-northern view about the war. His 1898 *Essays* series called the Confederacy a "rebellion" that the Union was justified in suppressing. The race-baiting remarks of some of his students, especially Fleming's outbursts, turned him off.<sup>17</sup> But Owen became Fleming's trusted collaborator. Beginning in several fall, 1901 letters to Owen, Fleming asked for a copy of the Ku Klux Klan initiation oath as printed in the April 1, 1868 issue of Ryland Randolph's *Tuskaloosa Monitor* and Klan-related material "in

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<sup>16</sup>Smith & Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School*.

<sup>17</sup>See the respective essays on Dunning's students in *Ibid*.

certain of the issues of the Selma Argus.” A few months later Fleming requested a copy of Smith’s secession *Debates*. Owen sent these along with a notice that he had asked John W. Beverly, president of the State Normal School for African-Americans at Montgomery, to mail Fleming a copy of his recently-published *History of Alabama*. Owen assured Fleming that Beverly’s list of Reconstruction-era “negro officers” was “dependable,” and that if Fleming harbored any doubts about it he could write to former Republican legislator Robert Barber.<sup>18</sup>

The next spring Fleming explained that he planned to look at “Social and Economic Conditions of Alabama during the war.” He had worked quickly in the meantime, writing 450 manuscript pages covering events up to 1867. Fleming’s progress was slowing a bit because he was “stuck on the [David P.] Lewis administration and [certain?] of the carpetbaggers. Found but little material on them.” Volumes from Owen on the proceedings of the 1901 state constitutional convention encouraged Fleming to think about ties between distant and recent pasts. He wondered if “there any valuable references in the Proceedings...about the Recon[struction] times? Seems to me [Thomas Wilkes] Coleman made a speech on it[?]”<sup>19</sup>

While waiting for Owen to look into that, Fleming began working up an article on “Tories, Deserters & the Peace Movement in Ala 61-5....It may be a little controversial for Ala.,” he admitted after finding that some Confederate officers in northern Alabama had allegedly parlayed to switch sides. Hitherto certain that all Confederates had acted rightly, the historian suddenly confronted the contingent nature of wartime loyalties. That did not lead him to extend grace to southern Unionists; it only spread around the guilt. “It seems to me,” Fleming

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<sup>18</sup>Walter L. Fleming to Owen, September 28 and November 1, 1901; Owen to Fleming, October 9 and November 7, 1901 (all found in Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH).

<sup>19</sup>Fleming to Owen, April 10 and September 9, 1902, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

sighed, “that [Lewis E.] Parsons, [John Jacob] Seibels, [General Philip D.] Roddey, &c were engaged in semi-treasonable practices in 64 & 65...”<sup>20</sup> Owen made no comment on this, but kept sending materials. Eventually Fleming’s logjam cleared and he was able to draft several pages on Governor Lewis.

One of the papers Owen donated fascinated Fleming. This was the constitution and ritual of the Union League, a northern wartime organization exported south and opened up to African-Americans as a bulwark against the threats of ex-Confederates. Editors for the *Montgomery Advertiser* had reprinted the materials, taken from a column in the *Nashville Union and Dispatch*, in their paper’s July 24, 1867 issue, maintaining that “[it] bears...the impress of correctness.” What enthralled Fleming were the mystical elements of the ritual and the ‘fact’ that “[these] attracted the negro.” “The weird initiation ceremony,” Fleming later wrote, full of “secret, mysterious, and midnight mummery” like “the fire of liberty,” allegedly fueled by salted alcohol, and a series of intricate hand gestures, “made him feel fearfully good from his head to his toes.”<sup>21</sup>

To the close-minded Dunning scholar, Republican witchcraft explained in part why African Americans, childlike and trusting by nature, had supported Reconstruction. The ritual also explained why the carpetbaggers had enjoyed initial success in Alabama: “this ceremony of initiation was a most effective means of [their] impressing the negro, and of controlling him.” So taken was Fleming by the League ritual---“it is a rare document,” he noted with understatement---that he later asked for another copy to be reproduced in a documentary

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<sup>20</sup>Fleming to Owen, December 1, 1902, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH. In the final draft, Fleming held back from condemning Roddey or Seibels.

<sup>21</sup>Walter Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905), 559-560.

collection on Reconstruction, a project evidently on his mind by then. Owen mailed several copies. Worrying that they might have gotten misplaced, he dispatched several more, along with a copy of the League's catechism.<sup>22</sup>

Analysis of voting patterns was to be a key part of Fleming's dissertation. In early 1903 he sent Owen a list gleaned from other sources of total votes for every Alabama election since the end of the war. Fleming asked Owen if he had records showing the breakdown of these votes "in thousands" by race and by party. With the information Fleming would construct a chart "to show the gradual shifting (or suppression) of the negro vote to the Democratic column." He also aimed to make "an estimate of the white elements in the Radical vote." To provide a modern context for this information, Fleming further wanted "to get if possible the registration – white & black – for each county in 1902 under the new [disfranchisement] law" and "the County votes for & against the Convention & for & against the [new] Constitution. Have the figures been printed?"<sup>23</sup>

Owen replied that "there is absolutely no way by which the white and negro vote...can be separated." However, "From the time when the negro first began to vote up to the adoption of the [1875] Constitution, I would imagine that the Republican vote would pretty well represent the negro vote, with a small percent off." A larger problem, Owen continued, was that there were so few surviving voter registration lists; "if preserved...[they] would [make it] possible to determine the number of negroes who had registered prior to each election." Unable to give

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<sup>22</sup> Fleming to Owen, October 7, 1902, and December 11 and 23, 1903, Owen to Fleming, November 21 and 25, 1903, and February 20 and March 19, 1904, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH; Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 559-560.

<sup>23</sup>Fleming to Owen, February 1 and September 23, 1903, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

Fleming what he wanted, Owen suggested that he search period newspapers, because these “might reveal some imperfect statistics.”<sup>24</sup>

Owen was preaching to the choir at this juncture. No sources were more important to Fleming than period Alabama newspapers. He believed, as did many turn of the century professional historians, that newspapers were the best non-official records of the past. They synthesized eyewitness information and made it possible to track events in “real time,” as they unfolded, while capturing popular reactions. Notwithstanding the allegedly harsh hand of federal Reconstruction, there had been scores of city and county newspapers in operation then, printing whatever they wished to print.<sup>25</sup>

Fleming was specific with Owen about the sources he sought in this medium:

I should like to get more newspaper material than I have especially on '62-'64 and '68-'74. If you can lend me any of your files...I should like to have about 4 volumes on the war 1862-1864, each volume to be from different sections of the state, Montgomery, Mobile, Western & Northern Ala. From 1868 to 1874 I should like about 8 vols similarly scattered not to include the Selma or

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<sup>24</sup>Owen to Fleming, February 9, 1903, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>25</sup>As the Cullman *Tribune Gazette* noted on November 1, 1902, “The [archives] department makes a specialty of newspaper files, taking the view that they embody and preserve the real history of the people.”

Montgomery...papers. Should like the Register and some white county papers.<sup>26</sup>

Fleming trusted Reconstruction-era Alabama newspapers because the vast majority had been run by anti-Reconstruction white Southerners. In their “ubiquitous treatment of the race problem, their anachronistic adjustment to the one-party system...and their mixed reaction to the impact of Reconstruction and industrialization,” the papers were hardly dissimilar from their New South successors. Fleming had no reason to even consider what historians since have had to face, namely that newspapers are as flawed as other sources. Being “news,” they concentrate on the immediate and what editors judge newsworthy. By their nature covering current events in limited spatial scope, newspapers rarely reflect on, re-examine, or contextualize past or contemporary happenings. For example, though there might be “literal accuracy” in “a report of fragmentary election returns”---as Owen suggested---that accuracy might be “misleading and untruthful...without reference to past trends and voting patterns.” Moreover, as social organs newspapers are shaped by public opinions and tastes as much as they document them.<sup>27</sup>

By this time, the two men were close colleagues. As Fleming prepped for publication, Owen sent him a congressional report on Reconstruction and had the Wisconsin Historical Society mail a copy of the constitution of the Knights of the White Camelia, a white southern paramilitary organization. Fleming hastily incorporated some of the materials into his closing chapters, secured Owen’s editorial assistance, and asked him to recommend a marketing

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<sup>26</sup>Fleming to Owen, July 2, 1903, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>27</sup>O. Lawrence Burton, Jr., *Beneath the Footnote: A Guide to the Use and Preservation of American Historical Sources* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1969), 267, 271-272.

strategy.<sup>28</sup> Four hundred copies would have to sell, Fleming figured, before he could recover his expenses. Having shepherded McMorries' regimental history from manuscript to book, Owen was ready with suggestions. "Prepare a list of about one thousand names of persons, who are book buyers," he wrote. "A circular and personal letter should be sent to every one of these...It should embrace lawyers, preachers, doctors, teachers, business men...After the book is published and in circulation you could count on at least one hundred additional subscribers from the general trade." He then gave Fleming's manuscript a cursory glance, except for "the part about which I know least, and which therefore interest[ed] me most...that which related to Alabama in the War," which given Owen's job may have been more flattery than candid truth. Fleming's "chapter on numbers and losses from Alabama," drawn from Brewer's *Alabama Record*, was to Owen's thinking "as accurate as you could make it." Owen's only doubt was "your statement as to Col. M. V. Moore being good authority" for Alabama's military mobilization; "that I would strike out."<sup>29</sup>

A review of the citations in *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* shows that Owen provided other materials besides those mentioned above. Fleming cited Owen's expanded version of Pickett's Alabama history twice in his introduction. There were two citations for *Transactions* articles, one pertaining to a study of Alabama's wartime Episcopal Bishop, Richard Wilmer, and another for Petrie's biographical sketch of William Samford, the ex-Confederate statesman from Auburn who as governor had approved the ADAH's enabling legislation. A citation on page 519 that provided information on Alabama's constitutional delegates came from

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<sup>28</sup>John W. DuBose also reviewed part of Fleming's first manuscript, Owen to Fleming, June 23, 1903, Fleming to Owen, June 24, 1903, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>29</sup>Owen to Fleming, July 18 and 29, 1903, July 19 and December 8, 1904, Fleming to Owen, October 31, 1903, July 15, 1904, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH. Fleming however kept the Moore citation, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, p. 78-79.

the *Official and Statistical Register* for 1903. For recruitment and attrition figures for the state's Confederate units, Fleming cited Captain Henry Fowler's collection of wartime records, which Owen had first processed.

Fleming already was thinking about a follow-up. Rather than write another monograph, he wanted to assemble a two-volume documentary collection. That way, reviewers claiming bias in *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* could read the original sources for themselves, while students would have materials for their own projects. More importantly, a documentary collection would let Fleming off-load materials that had not made it into his book. Fleming proposed to issue a series of topically-structured pamphlets as teasers for the work. Before his book finally went to press, Fleming published eight pamphlets, one of which, he told Owen, included two ADAH documents.

Once more, Fleming asked for Owen's help with marketing and finding materials.<sup>30</sup> "I have just examined your circular," Owen responded, "and it occurs to me that possibly I may assist you. If you will kindly indicate points where you think I can add to the collection, let me know." As for the pamphlets, Fleming should mail review copies to the South's largest newspapers and members of the AHS and the Tennessee Valley Historical Society. Endorsements from Alabama and Auburn professors McCorvey, Petrie, Phillips, and Thach were a must-have too if Fleming wanted decent sales.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Fleming to Owen, March 31, April 30, and July 27, 1904, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>31</sup>Owen to Fleming, September 16, December 16 and 19, 1905, June 9, 1906, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

Fleming hardly needed Owen's go-ahead to proceed. His potential publisher, the Arthur C. Clark Company of Cleveland, expected the manuscripts within a year. He had already inquired if Owen could find a clerk in the state Supreme Court able to give "[an] analysis" of cases "involving reconstruction principles, such as the case in which the court held that whites and blacks may intermarry. Can you have [someone] bring it up & copy for me the striking points of the decision?" Fleming's requests soon came thick and fast: he sought "newspaper references relating to church schools 1865-6," other "'freak' decisions" of the carpetbagger courts, "two or more semi-documentary cartoons, Ku Klux, Union League, Negro legislature pictures suitable for frontispiece," and "a Ku Klux order or something like the [Ryland] Randolph hanging picture" from the September 1, 1868 issue of the Tuscaloosa *Independent Monitor*. Above all, Fleming wanted every scrap of paper that Owen could find on the Klan. Extra materials for that organization would go into a monograph if they were cut from the documentary collection.<sup>32</sup>

Owen sent Fleming everything he asked for, plus extras. A memoir by the *Advertiser's* editor, Captain Screws, entitled "The 'Loil' Legislature of Alabama," came in time while Fleming was assembling the collection's second volume. There were Klan references and pictures from a Houston, Texas newspaper. In a July 21, 1906 letter Owen informed Fleming that he would soon receive an "Extract from the Minutes of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1865," an "Extract from the Minutes of the Synod of Alabama, 1865," "Extracts from Mont Daily Adv of Nov 11 and 25, 1865," and "Extract from Advertiser of July 24, 1867." An additional "two prints of Ku Klux orders from the Tuscaloosa Monitor of April 1868," arriving in a later package, would gratify Fleming's desire for materials from the *Monitor's*

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<sup>32</sup>Fleming to Owen, March 10, 1905, June 13, July 5 and 17, 1906, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

volatile editor, Ryland Randolph. Supplementary newspaper material from 1867-1868 about scalawag and educational reformer Jabez L. M. Curry, freedmen's petitions for tolerance, the development of "Colored Schools of Montgomery," and quite naturally, another Klan notice, came to Fleming late in July. Obviously some of these sources pointed to a contending narrative of Reconstruction, but Fleming wanted them in order to demonstrate what he considered the program's complete insanity. Owen agreed with Fleming's commitment to supposed impartiality. "These files [contain] a vast mass of information for the history," he wrote, "...from the side of the combined opposition to the democratic party." Still, Owen felt it necessary to warn Fleming, "[They] are taken from the...organ of the Radical forces of the State. This will account for their tone."<sup>33</sup>

Researching and writing the documentary collection proved easier for Fleming than marketing and selling it. The release of volume II coincided with a long spell of bad weather across the Deep South that kept people at home and away from the bookstores. "The storm will I fear cut down sales in Ala. this fall," Fleming worried. Knowing Owen's influence with the state legislature, Fleming asked him if the lawmakers might spring for copies to send to public school libraries. Owen did not want to try it; he had used up a lot of his capitol credits at that point pushing for more department funds and office space, and he suspected the legislature wanted a break from him for a while. The director would continue to send out Fleming's press circulars, however, and forward Fleming contacts for potential distributors, like one Birmingham book company. Further sales might pick up in a year or two. For now, Owen told Fleming, the

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<sup>33</sup>Owen to Fleming, August 5 and September 15, 1905, July 14, 21, and 26, 1906, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

market for books like his was saturated. People did not want to buy only historical studies.<sup>34</sup> From their later correspondence, it seems that Fleming accepted the reading public's fickleness with more aplomb than Edward McMorries had. After all, with three books to his credit and a tenured position at the West Virginia University as of 1903, he could afford to be patient.

Over a two-year period, Owen sent Fleming dozens of items for his documentary collection, the vast majority newspaper pieces. Five documents made the cut for the two volumes of Fleming's *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational & Industrial 1865 to the Present Time* (1906). One, chosen as the frontispiece for volume I, was the September 1868 Klan woodcut cartoon by Ryland Randolph that Fleming had specifically asked for. Randolph's cartoon had warned carpetbagger Arad Lakin and scalawag Noah Cloud not to reopen the University of Alabama under Republican control if they valued their lives. The inclusion of the cartoon in Fleming's collection probably helped make it one of the better-known popular images of the Reconstruction era.<sup>35</sup>

The other four Owen documents Fleming included were "Resolutions Adopted By The Annual Convention Of The Methodist Protestant Church Of Alabama," "On Religious Instruction," "An Appeal For The Freedman," and "Shall The Negro Be Educated?" The first two articulated conservative stances from white Protestants towards interracial church membership and education. "Shall The Negro Be Educated?" came from the December 30, 1865 issue of the Selma *Morning Times*, and grudgingly acknowledged that African-Americans should

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<sup>34</sup>Fleming to Owen, October 15, 1906, Owen to Fleming, October 22 and November 1, 1906, Individuals A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>35</sup>G. Ward Hubbs, *Searching for Freedom after the Civil War: Klansman, Carpetbagger, Scalawag, and Freedman* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), provides an engaging tandem biography of the principal figures represented in the cartoon.

have state-supported schools--not because it was in their best interests, but because it would keep them from making mischief against Alabama's white population. The "Appeal," taken from the same newspaper issue, was a broadside from "the colored people of Selma." Obsequious yet at the same time insistent, it was addressed to "dear friends and former masters," hoping for "your kindest approbation" of a plan to purchase land and set up independent African-American trade schools.<sup>36</sup>

Had Owen laid out exactly why he thought these pieces had special historical value, or had Fleming disclosed why he kept them and cut the others, we might understand a bit more about each man's *mentalite*. Unfortunately there is nothing to elucidate Owen's selection or Fleming's editorial processes. The winnowing of material might have come from simply length or personal taste. As Fleming admitted in the preface to volume I, "Owing to the necessity for condensation I have had to leave unused five-sixths of the material gathered while all that has been included has been subjected to a vigorous pruning of all unessential matter."<sup>37</sup>

Including one document meant casting aside several others, of course, and Fleming knew that this raised the inevitable question of scholarly objectivity. He met the challenge head-on by positioning his volumes as two sides of one story. "While the bias of the document in the first volume is toward the Radical," he explained, "the reverse is true of the second volume." Fleming further pointed out that pro-Reconstruction voices dominated in the documentary collection, with 118 sources on their side against 64 containing anti-Reconstruction sentiments and 70 "more or less indifferent or impartial." How could anyone accuse him of stacking the

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<sup>36</sup>"An Appeal From The Freedmen," *Morning Times*, December 30, 1865.

<sup>37</sup>Walter L. Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational & Industrial 1865 to the Present Time* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1906), vol. I, vii.

evidentiary deck against carpetbaggers, scalawags, and “negroes,” much as he disliked them? If anything, he had given them a potentially winning hand. That was more than fair, as far as Fleming was concerned.<sup>38</sup>

As an archivist, Owen did not consciously try to shape the research of Phillips, Bancroft, Petrie, or Petrie’s students. With each of these scholars, Owen did as his job required, loaning or copying source materials as requested. As a matter of course, Owen only provided what he had collected, which entailed prior evaluations on what was worth collecting in the first place. In that light, Owen’s failure to gather papers for Alabama men who had fought for the Union, and his professed inability to find manuscript writings on slave rebellions, may or may not have stemmed from a reluctance to look too hard.<sup>39</sup>

With Fleming however Owen was much more helpful, going above and beyond the call of duty to place the ADAH’s resources at the disposal of the Dunning Scholar. Owen’s close partnership with Fleming suggests the limits of his professional dispassion. Clearly he cared about historical writing and publication. After all, he had commissioned histories for Alabama Confederate units. Owen likewise decided to encourage other southern scholars’ work on articles addressing antebellum, wartime, and post-bellum matters. For outlets of this work, Owen would have the press, the AHS’ journal, and his very own periodical.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., viii-ix.

<sup>39</sup>Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH, passim; Smith, *Slavery, Race, and American History*, 137.

## 8. Owen Publishes, Part I: The Alabama Historical Society *Transactions*

As an amateur scientific historian, Owen favored the writing and publication of scholarly studies of the past. He himself had written several short historical studies and would until the very end of his life work on a history of Alabama. After joining and revitalizing the Alabama Historical Society, Owen also began revamping the society's publishing efforts. He regarded publication as "the most important matter to be accomplished" and envisioned producing several series of titles, including an "Annual Series, to contain the yearly proceedings and papers," a "Miscellaneous Series...to consist principally, of original or special material," and a collection of "Reminiscences, County and Town Histories, Biographies, Genealogies, and Institutional Series" written by "Competent persons."<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, Owen eventually had to pare down his grand vision to match the limited finances of the re-born AHS. The annual series, which Owen named the *Transactions* after his own pet reference to the society's papers, became its only published scholarly series.<sup>2</sup> Acting as editor, Owen personally selected certain papers read by members and guests at the yearly and semi-annual meetings of the AHS for the *Transactions*' volumes. Their subjects ranged widely, as Owen preferred and as the society's self-stated desire for topical inclusivity encouraged. In examining *Transactions* papers addressing antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction subjects, one can see that while the society's scholarship was pro-southern it was not arch-Confederate. The *Transactions* more crucially reveal Owen's priorities in subject matter and historical approaches.

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<sup>1</sup>*Circular No. 4, 6.*

<sup>2</sup>Owen to W. S. Wyman, March 9, 1892, Box 1, Letters, Owen Papers, ADAH.

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The inaugural volume of the *Transactions* appears to have been aborted, for there are no references to its existence. It should have been released in 1897, but at the time, the AHS had not yet rebuilt under Owen's guidance. Three years later Owen planned to publish all the society's papers and reports from 1850 to 1897 in a single volume. He was brought up short by "the loss or misplacement of all our old records, which renders it impossible to properly present our official proceedings." By the 1903 annual meeting, Owen had decided to include newspaper articles on the society's meetings if he could not find internal papers or minutes.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately he never got the volume printed.

With an enlarged, revived society, and the Alabama History Committee approved and running, however, Owen made sure to complete the next volume, numbered "II" despite having no known predecessor. He gathered eighteen papers which he hoped "will meet the demand of students everywhere" as "valuable contributions to the historical literature of the State." Owen pointed with pride at the "wide range of subject matter – bibliography, biography, criticism, education, original documents, statistics, with Church, local, Indian and war history." Peer review, editing, and footnotes for the volume had all been his responsibilities he noted, "in the common tendency now prevailing in all history work."<sup>4</sup>

Institutional history dominated Volume II. AHS members contributed papers on Alabama public education, the state roads, the boundary with Mississippi, county and

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<sup>3</sup>"Proceedings, June 18, 1900," *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1899-1903, Volume IV* (Tuscaloosa: N. p., 1904): 36; "Appendix to the Proceedings," *Ibid*: 580.

<sup>4</sup>*Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1897-1898, Volume II* (Tuscaloosa: N. p., 1899): 5-6.

Episcopalian Church statistics, and a sketch of the antebellum Columbian Institute at Taylorville. Narratives of Native American history, a posthumous 1894 reminiscence about Alabama legislator Joseph G. Baldwin, and a brief, admiring biography of Confederate senator Clement C. Clay by his widow rounded out the volume. Three of the papers, including “Sessions of the General Assembly of Alabama” and “Statistics of the Counties of Alabama,” were Owen’s own work.

There was, in contrast, surprisingly little on the Civil War or Reconstruction. Elderly J. J. Garrett provided a history of his unit, the 44<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. Garrett tried to cover four years of service in five pages, which meant that his paper was not much larger than one of Willis Brewer’s regimental snippets. The only hard data Garrett included were the field and staff roster and a list of counties that had contributed companies. Otherwise Garrett gave estimates, rounding off the regiment’s casualties in various battles to proportions or percentages such as “one-third,” “one-fifth,” “two-thirds,” or “forty per cent” of total strength.<sup>5</sup> Edmund W. Pettus’ submission on the eponymous Alabama brigade he had led was briefer still, comprising two pages of a wartime letter outlining the brigade’s organization and history. For both papers, Owen’s few heavily genealogical footnotes provided more substance than the main text.

The other pertinent paper on the war was Owen’s own “The Work of William Henry Fowler as Superintendent of Army Records, 1863-1865.” It was a subject Owen was just then getting to know well. Because “Alabama was the first of the seceding States which undertook, during the progress of hostilities, to preserve the records of her troops...for the purposes of history,” Owen’s soon-to-come archival department would have much material to preserve.

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<sup>5</sup>J. J. Garrett, “Forty-fourth Alabama Regiment,” *Ibid*: passim.

Fully cognizant of the byzantine intricacies of Alabama's Confederate forces, Owen's paper stressed the power of one conscientious man to overcome all odds gathering precious records. In a sense his paper was both a thank-you to Fowler and a pat on the back to himself, put in the mouths of Alabama's Confederate soldiers. "What a thrill of heart must have come to these officers and soldiers," Owen declaimed, "as they read that the facts secure were to be 'compiled into a Historical Record, to be preserved in the archives of the State.'" Owen footnoted his paper rigorously and reproduced in full Fowler's final report to Alabama governor Lewis Parsons.<sup>6</sup>

When it was time for Volume III in 1899, Owen retained control of citation. According to the preface there had been "general approval of his editorial work in vol. ii, both from members and historical students generally."<sup>7</sup> One change Owen did make was in organization. The third volume contained eighteen topically extensive papers in Part I, while six papers in a thematic Part II marked the one-hundredth anniversary of Spain's withdrawal from the Louisiana Purchase territories, another topic that fascinated Owen. The Spanish Evacuation Centennial was not exclusively Owen's brainchild, but he had helped form the centennial committee, twisted the government's arm to recognize it, and emceed the historic site ceremonies.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps because of the centenary, most of Volume III addressed Alabama's Creek and early territorial history, not the 1861-1877 period. Owen extracted from Fowler's records a one-and-a-half-page list of "General and Staff Officers from Alabama in the War, 1861-1865," and pointed readers to several compendiums for fuller information. In a sketch prepared before his death in 1890, ex-Confederate general Cadmus Wilcox summarized the history of his brigade up

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<sup>6</sup>Owen, "The Work of William Henry Fowler as Superintendent of Army Records, 1863-1865," *Ibid.*: 178, 180.

<sup>7</sup>*Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1898-1899, Volume III* (Tuscaloosa: N. p. 1899): 5.

<sup>8</sup>According to the committee's report, Owen had "endorsed heartily" a newspaper article arguing for a centennial, "Report of the Spanish Evacuation Centennial Committee," *Ibid.*: 195.

to the spring of 1862. His sketch featured no vivid battle accounts, no incisive character descriptions, and no anecdotes, only a succession of Virginia locations and dates and directions of movement. After reading Wilcox's paper, it is no wonder that Owen later allowed Hilary Herbert to give Wilcox's Alabamians historical depth, narrative color, and grounds for having fought. John DuBose's "Tales of Personal Adventure – Recollections of Incidents in the War Between the States" was more gripping reading, casting humble privates of the state's Confederate militia as cloak-and-dagger secret agents who thwarted Union occupation troops and homegrown Unionist guerrillas with grit and gumption. DuBose likely drew on personal interviews for his paper, which he thought demonstrated "lessons in virtue in the life of the republic...omitted by the 'histories.'"<sup>9</sup>

Wider ranging than any of these offerings was Dr. W. R. Garrett's national narrative, filtered through a southern lens. "The Work of the South in Building the United States" set forth its principal position in the title. Similar to contemporary southern historians writing from a national vantage point, Garrett, the history chair at the Peabody Normal School in Nashville, Tennessee, saw the South not as a strange place outside the American mainstream but as the epicenter of Americanism. The United States had become great in part because of the work of southern leaders. Garrett stressed this point because so many of the history books of his day praised New England brilliance and Midwestern industry while clucking their tongues at the South's economic backwardness, intellectual incapacity, and historical marginality. This was not the right way, Garrett thought, to instill a common American spirit, for the United States would never be great unless all sections and regions were recognized as vital parts of the national

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<sup>9</sup>John Witherspoon DuBose, "Tales of Personal Adventure – Recollections of Incidents in the War Between the States," *Ibid.*: 178, 183.

fabric. “If we wish our children to love the United States,” Garrett wrote, “we must make them proud of the United States... We must not permit the false lesson to be imparted that our [southern] ancestors were drones in this hive, and mere participants in the blessings which other sections have conferred.”<sup>10</sup>

But if the South by Garrett’s estimation had physically built the Union, then was not the South indirectly responsible for the territorial tensions of the 1840s and 1850s that led to civil war? Garrett at first skirted the question, claiming “I have not time to recount the causes which forced the Southern leaders to become the authors of the Mexican War.” Later he candidly admitted that this war “was the only one waged for conquest,” that “we put the iron heel on the neck of Mexico, and deprived her of her possessions... whatever of glory and whatever of shame attach to such a course belong of right to the South.” In a brief moment of defensiveness, Garrett also alluded to New England’s sectional obstinacy in the War of 1812 in order to rationalize southern sectional obstinacy in 1861---a pet comparison for Lost Cause advocates. One or two hasty mentions of “slavery” honored the letter of the historian’s law if not the spirit. Garrett would not suggest that the South’s peculiar institution had been the main reason why antebellum white Southerners had wanted to enlarge the United States.<sup>11</sup>

At last Garrett cut to the chase. “Would you tell...our children...about the Civil War?” he imagined his audience asking. “Yes I would tell them,” Garrett replied, for “I have no sympathy with the effort to make believe that there has been no war, or to pretend that there are no sections.” The war had happened, but Garrett was not inclined to point accusing fingers at its

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<sup>10</sup>Dr. W. R. Garrett, “The Work of the South in Building the United States,” *Ibid.*: 43; Laura F. Edwards, “Southern History as U.S. History,” *Journal of Southern History* 75 (August 2009): 533-564.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*: 41.

alleged instigators. As an early twentieth century nationalist historian, he considered what had happened in 1861-1865 an inevitable occurrence, the kind every modern nation went through during its maturation period. “Let no American be ashamed of it,” Garrett declared. “It is America’s proudest title to martial glory, and the grandest contribution which the nineteenth century has made to human grandness.” Garrett explained that that “grandest contribution” had been the brotherly bravery of northern and southern Anglo-Saxon combatants, fitting role models for those busy taking up the “white man’s burden” when Garrett wrote his paper. The United States and its colonial territories were both better for North and South having once fought each other.<sup>12</sup>

The first two volumes of the *Transactions* show that both Owen and the AHS were still feeling their way towards a scholarly métier. Most of the papers were threadbare in sources, awkwardly constructed, and amateurishly argued. To a large degree, that was par for the course. “It is not disparagement of his efforts to say that many of the articles he published [in the *Transactions*] were of doubtful value,” southern historian Wendell Holmes Stephenson wrote about this phase of Owen’s career, “for that fault was common to most of the state historical society publications of his day, and to some in our own.”<sup>13</sup>

Five years passed before Owen released Volume IV. In the meantime he had established the ADAH and discovered that directing a state agency was a lot of work, especially when the off hours were the busiest. Pulled a hundred different ways by pension seekers, politicians, heritage groups, and old cronies, Owen had hardly had time to catch breath. “The delay in the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.: 42-43.

<sup>13</sup>Stephenson, “Pioneer Archivist,” 207.

appearance of the *Transactions*,” he confessed to readers in 1904, “has been due to the inability of the secretary and editor to devote the necessary time to the work of preparation and publication.” The fourth volume was therefore deliberately oversized, comprising every AHS report and essay from 1900 through 1903, thirty-nine papers in all.<sup>14</sup>

On the plus side, the fourth volume included top-notch scholarship. Walter Fleming had a paper ready for the *Transactions*, as did George Petrie. As an added benefit, the seminar program at Auburn University had born fruit. With their professor’s encouragement, several of Petrie’s students had read their own papers before the AHS. The growing preponderance of academic contributions pleased Owen, in part because they eased his editorial workload. “No longer was it necessary for the editor to document most of the studies he printed,” Stephenson noted, “for those from Petrie’s ‘laboratory’ had at least the outward appearance of scholarly paraphernalia.”<sup>15</sup>

Though no greater a percentage of total papers than before, antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction papers were more numerous in Volume IV. Walter Fleming read “The Buford Expedition to Kansas” at the society’s 1900 meeting. Fleming took as his topic the attempted settlement of Kansas-Nebraska Territory by Alabamians under Jefferson Buford’s emigration aid society. The Buford Expedition was one of several attempts to colonize Kansas for slavery, although none of Buford’s followers had brought slaves with them. Unsurprisingly, Fleming defended the Buford Expedition. Fleming’s final footnote, a long excerpt of an interview with Buford’s brother, underscored a fatalistic view that the expedition was doomed from the start: “I

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<sup>14</sup>*Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1899-1903, Volume IV* (Tuscaloosa: N. p., 1904): 5.

<sup>15</sup>Stephenson, “Pioneer Archivist,” 208.

was very much opposed to his expedition and ridiculed and opposed it all I could. Told him it would be a disastrous failure, but without avail.” Fleming agreed. “[This] colonization plan was a failure financially and politically,” he wrote. “The institutions of the South could not be transplanted to Kansas.” Source-wise, he operated much as he would for his dissertation, relying principally on southern newspapers. His supplementary sources included a few reminiscences from northern-born Kansas settlers, Buford’s letters preserved at the Kansas Historical Society, federal government reports, and a biography of Kansas anti-slavery icon John Brown.<sup>16</sup>

For the 1901 meeting, George Petrie and his student Toccoa Cozart provided biographical papers. Cozart, a pioneering woman historian, turned the spotlight on Henry W. Hilliard, a moderate Alabama Whig Party congressman often overshadowed by his enemy, William Yancey. Hilliard’s numerous speeches were Cozart’s main sources, and their lack of gasconade helped her portray Hilliard as a reasonable man to whom southerners ought to have listened. Cozart applauded Hilliard’s “brave words with which [he] face[d] a slave-holding constituency, and a vigilant and unsparing political opposition!” In a tie-in to Fleming’s paper, Cozart also recounted Hilliard’s speech to Buford’s departing colonists. She wrote that “Hilliard’s rostrum for this occasion was a cotton bale...on the wharf at Montgomery.” Bravely “he counselled [sic] a spirit of peace and conciliation; and urged them to act on the defensive, to go armed with the truth and the constitution rather than with Sharpe’s rifles.”<sup>17</sup> She went on to follow Hilliard as he joined the Democrats in the 1850s, raised a legion during the war, and proved to be “if...not ‘first in war’...a very able ‘second.’” Unwilling to outline her subject’s

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<sup>16</sup>W. L. Fleming, “The Buford Expedition to Kansas,” *Transactions, Vol. IV*: 191. Carole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), makes white male republican liberties, rather than merely pro-slavery or free labor ideologies, the central point of contention and the reason for violence between northern and southern settlers.

<sup>17</sup>Miss Toccoa Cozart, “Henry W. Hilliard,” *Ibid.*: 285, 287.

post-bellum life, Cozart ended the paper with a block quote from an antebellum letter displaying Hilliard's "social influence...in establishing that name for hospitality which became typical of the South."<sup>18</sup>

Cozart had a slightly easier task defending Hilliard than her major professor did celebrating William Lowndes Yancey. No one could blame Hilliard for having started the Civil War; plenty of people could---and did---blame Yancey, whose "Alabama Platform" demanding explicit federal protection of slave property in the western territories had contributed to the 1860 Democratic fracture. Already disliked by southern moderates, Yancey had added to their obloquy by proposing to overturn the Congressional ban on the African slave trade, a highly unpopular measure. After the firing on Fort Sumter, the reluctant secessionists running the Confederate government, in particular President Jefferson Davis, were increasingly embarrassed by the loud-mouthed fire-eater from Alabama. Yancey for his part had felt underappreciated in the southern nation he had helped form. Nor had Yancey been a perfect Confederate. He had despised the Confederacy's centralizing war policies, failed as Confederate minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain---for which posting he was temperamentally ill-suited anyway---and after returning home fell into despondency, hurling astringent critiques at Davis and the Confederate congress. Yancey, once the darling of the South, ended his days as an embittered gadfly.<sup>19</sup>

Yet like any uncompromising, unfiltered public figure, Yancey had always had his supporters. Well-read on Yancey's life and era, Petrie gamely took up his defense. He noted

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.: 288, 298-299.

<sup>19</sup>Eric Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

that “The time is rapidly coming when men can think and speak of our Civil War without passion and without prejudice.” As proof, Petrie noted that many white Southerners had come to appreciate Abraham Lincoln’s better qualities, whereas a few white Northerners could even venture some praise of South Carolina’s arch nullifier, John C. Calhoun. Yancey did not yet have a champion in “this era of ‘good feelings,’” and some preferred to forget him altogether. Petrie acknowledged that on the surface there might be valid reasons for “this omission.” “Is it due to a feeling on the part of some,” the professor ventured, “that Yancey was the embodiment of an unwise and disastrous policy [and] that even his eloquence depended on sectional passions and animosity?” No doubt this was true for most Americans when they thought of Yancey, but Petrie was confident that Yancey’s time was coming, and indeed had come. “Now I believe that his name will not be forgotten,” Petrie declared, “and that his reputation will last.” Petrie proceeded to analyze Yancey’s oratory, defend him as a reluctant secessionist, and insist that he really did not want to reopen the African slave trade, but simply wanted to leave it to the states.<sup>20</sup>

Another paper by a Petrie student focused on moderate antebellum statesmen’s opposition to ultra states rightists like Yancey. J. E. D. Yonge read “The Conservative Party in Alabama, 1848-1860” at the 1902 AHS meeting. For his paper, Yonge dug through southern newspapers, Hodgson’s *Cradle of the Confederacy*, the memoirs of Hilliard and Confederate general Richard Taylor, DuBose’s Yancey biography, and a two-year-old Alabama school textbook. He also analyzed the Alabama Platform, reproducing its planks in a footnote, translating its opaque language into simple terms, and connecting the planks to specific political issues. In Yonge’s account, the ultras were not a strong political force until the very eve of secession. Consequently, southern political thinking had been much cooler and calculated than

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<sup>20</sup>George Petrie, “What Will be the Final Estimate of Yancey?” *Ibid.*: 308.

was commonly thought. Yonge dispassionately concluded that the moderates feared ultra-led intransigence would backfire, leading to a split Democracy and the choice of submission or secession. No less committed to southern rights than the ultras, moderates were simply more circumspect in their language.<sup>21</sup>

In covering the realm of high politics Yonge did avoid grappling with the moral implications of the South's "institutions." In like manner his focus on moderates' misgivings about some of the ultras' programs obscured their own preference that slavery should spread westward. Much as he deliberately avoided controversy, Yonge also deliberately avoided taking an honest look at certain aspects of southern history.

The *Transactions* was never an exclusively scholarly journal, however.

Counterbalancing these scholarly papers from Auburn was a pair of reminiscences by ex-Confederates. Sutton S. Scott prepared his "Recollections of the Alabama Democratic State Convention of 1860" with little else than fading memories to guide him. "I fear," Scott told AHS members, "as I have no ready access to papers relating to that convention...I may now and then be guilty of inaccuracies, none of which, however, I am sure, will be vital or important." Owen had to prime his pump with secondary sources. He remembered having been intrigued by Yancey---as most conventioners had been---but maintained that Alabama's loose cannon had been careful and tactical throughout the proceedings. The centerpiece of Scott's paper was when Yancey and a conditional Unionist opponent made simultaneous nominations for Speaker. A

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<sup>21</sup>For an analysis of Alabama's antebellum political parties and major developments, see J. Mills Thornton III, *Power and Politics in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). For the rearguard resistance of southern moderates, in this case the states of the Upper South, see Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

rough-housing game of musical chair(s) followed before a third secessionist candidate brought everything back under control. Overall Scott kept a buoyant, humorous tone; no heavy historical analysis for him. Individual characters preening, declaiming, hemming, and hawing were what interested Scott about the past. “The other notable operations of this convention,” Scott recounted with a biblical flourish, “with all their widespread and momentous results...are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the Confederacy?”<sup>22</sup>

T. P. Clinton expressed less confidence than Scott that the chroniclers had written it all down correctly. His paper, “The Military Operations of General John T. Croxton in West Alabama, 1865,” was again written from a limited first-person perspective, but still challenged the *OR* about this episode of the Civil War. Clinton was certain that the official records—and notably Union General Croxton’s after-action reports—underplayed the discomfiture the Yankees had gotten into and undercounted their actual losses. The old Confederate was equally certain that Croxton’s capture of Tuscaloosa was the fault of the University of Alabama’s cadet corps, who during the fight for the town had not placed their cannon where range and line-of-sight were optimal. Clinton figured that Croxton had days earlier sowed the countryside around Tuscaloosa with spies, despite there being no documentation to prove this. Clinton wrapped up his paper with the requisite vignettes of thieving Yankee troopers ransacking southern homes while clever white Southerners found ways to hide their valuables.<sup>23</sup>

The other pertinent papers in Volume IV are easily summarized. In “Descendants of John Purifoy Who Were Confederate Soldiers,” Francis Marion Purifoy shared his family tree to

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<sup>22</sup>S. S. Scott, “Recollections of the Alabama Democratic State Convention of 1860,” *Ibid.*: 313, 320.

<sup>23</sup>The best secondary treatment of Croxton’s operations, which were part of Wilson’s Raid, can be found in James Pickett Jones, *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson’s Raid through Alabama and Georgia* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1976).

demonstrate its commitment to the Confederate cause. Sixteen men in Purifoy's immediate and extended family wore the gray, most dying or becoming disabled in service. Owen in his editorial notes claimed the idea was his. He and Purifoy had "no purpose to exploit family history" but rather to "illustrat[e] the record of one family" providing "enlistment and active service of all male members...of a common family."<sup>24</sup>

Owen also included a 1901 honorarium for Confederate veterans by the UDC's Robert E. Rodes Chapter in the volume because AHS members had jointly attended the ceremony during their annual meeting. The presenter, attorney and politician Tennent Lomax, Jr., waxed panegyric, paying tribute to Jefferson Davis ("him upon whose shoulders rested the awful weight of the gigantic struggle of the South"), Rodes ("who...made glorious the name of the Alabama soldier and finally sealed in his heart's blood...his devotion to the glorious cause"), white pro-Confederate southern women ("like the diamond crushed and ground to powder by the mills of the gods...yet glistening in beauty even in the dust of misfortune"), and naturally, the Confederate common soldier. Juxtaposed with the scholarly and semi-scholarly papers that abutted it, Lomax's speech sticks out like a sore thumb. In its imagery of "fields of blood and carnage," "ruined homes," "brilliant charges," "the cold bivouac and the frozen trench," the "stainless...manacled...hands" of Davis, and "that star-crossed banner 'which no longer reflects the light of the morning sunbeam,'" it is the only full-throated Lost Cause piece in any volume of the *Transactions*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Francis Marion Purifoy, "Descendants of John Purifoy Who Were Confederate Soldiers," *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>25</sup>"Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, June 3, 1901"; Tennent Lomax, "Address on the Presentation of Crosses of Honor to Confederate Veterans by the R. E. Rodes Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy," *Ibid.*: 265-268; Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*; Towns, *Enduring Legacy*.

Volume V proved to be the last. Antebellum and war-time topics informed nearly half of the ten papers presented at the society's 1905 annual meeting. Russell M. Cunningham, a physician and one-time lieutenant governor of Alabama, led off with "Historical Interpretation," a précis for Whig history. "Men in their organization have evolved," Cunningham declared, "from the simple family relationship to the great aggregates of nations, government and civilizations...The present is the summit of human history and the basis of the future." A Whiggish faith in Anglo-Saxon progress, resting on increasingly-complex institutions, nonetheless had to take into account inevitable variations in geographies, climates, and social systems. Different times, different places, and different peoples must figure into the historian's calculations, Cunningham reminded his readers. Sweeping judgments were best avoided. One example of his, Cunningham thought, was the institution of southern chattel slavery. Evil the North had called it, but, Cunningham asked, was not that moral judgment actually a cultural judgment reflecting the values of northern institutions? Because slavery could never have taken root in the cold soil of the North, it was simple for Northerners to argue that it had been unnatural. The southern climate by contrast, being well-suited to slavery, had encouraged the "slavery is a positive good" mindset. "Therefore," Cunningham insisted, "the true student of history will never conclude that the differences of opinion, concerning this institution, were due to any inherent virtue upon the part of one section, or inherent deficiency in virtue upon the part of any other section."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Dr. Russell M. Cunningham, "Historical Interpretation," in *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society, 1904, Volume V* (Montgomery, N. p.: 1906): 41. Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, eds., offer a useful if older review of the principal schools of American historiography in *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives, Volume II – Since 1865*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: The Free Press, 1978). Dorothy Ross argues that by the turn of the century, optimistic Whig historians were slowly beginning to lose ground, "Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review* 89 (October 1984): 909-928, although Novick, "*That Noble Dream*," places their decline in the aftermath of the First World War.

Sutton Scott meanwhile submitted another memoir for “The Alabama Legislatures of 1857-8 and 1859-60.” He listed all senators and representatives by district and framed the paper as a story in-the-round, in which each Alabama statesmen illustrated his essence through his words. Exactly what the statesmen had said did not much concern Scott, who as before preferred sketching characters to parsing positions or policies. In one notable digression, Scott recounted the alcohol-fueled exploits of Nathan, an “African...body servant” of legislator Robert D. Huckabee. Nathan had proved so exasperating during the sessions that Huckabee emancipated him on the spot. “Here,” Scott recalled with amusement, “Nathan’s tongue was untied. He begged, prayed, and besought his master not to set him free – not to drive him off – *not to ruin him!*” With “Sambo” anecdotes like these to enliven the dreary business of government, legislative service before the war had been rather fun according to Scott. “I have...been led to live over again a glorious part of the past,” he sighed contentedly, “to wander, in fancy, amid the scenes belonging to the former civilization of the South – a civilization as unique and picturesque in its make-up, as it was grand in its results – now gone...from earth forever!”<sup>27</sup> Margaret Mitchell could not have phrased it better.

The volume’s other pertinent papers were, properly, institutional in content. Petrie’s student William Watson Davis read a paper on “Ante-Bellum Southern Commercial Conventions.” The subjects of Davis’ investigation were the odd dozen interstate meetings of the 1840s and 1850s where forward-thinking southern men, aware of their region’s colonial economic status vis-à-vis the North, had attempted to establish autarky below the Mason-Dixon line. “While [the conventions] were not meetings for Southern supremacy,” Davis argued, “they

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<sup>27</sup>S. S. Scott, “The Alabama Legislatures of 1857-8 and 1859-60,” *Ibid*: 43n, 67. For the characteristics of the “Sambo” and other African American stereotypes, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

can hardly be logically omitted in an account of that movement.” Southern economic mobilization had been, in Davis’ words, “another phase of the struggle” against northern domination, and they had held “very much the same relation to the body economic that the great political conventions” of 1860-1861 had “to the body politic.”<sup>28</sup>

Another Petrie student, Dallas T. Herndon, covered the 1850 Nashville Convention, where a handful of ultras had tried to organize early southern secession.<sup>29</sup> As Yonge had done for the Alabama Platform, Herndon fully reproduced the text of the convention’s formal proceedings, and explained what some of the esoterically-worded resolutions meant. Herndon also broke down, state by state, how each southern legislature had responded to the convention’s more aggressive proposals. Hasty motions of solidarity from some legislatures had according to Herndon produced a false positive of southern popular support for the convention. This mistaken belief was cleared up when the legislatures began backtracking during the lull between the first and second convention meetings. Notwithstanding the sudden cooling in southern states, the final meeting of the Nashville Convention had been fiery, the language unguarded, and the leading ultras ready to take their states out of the Union alone if need be. Based on lengthy extracts from delegates’ letters, Herndon positioned John C. Calhoun as the hidden hand manipulating the convention; hence its radical tone. Nevertheless convention opinion had run far

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<sup>28</sup>William Watson Davis, “Ante-Bellum Southern Commercial Conventions,” *Ibid.*: 153, 156. John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (New York: Norton, 1981), chapter 3, views the commercial conventions as means of southern self-definition.

<sup>29</sup>Herndon later founded the Arkansas State Archives, “Our History,” Arkansas State Archives, accessed March 19, 2020, <http://archives.arkansas.gov/about-us/ahc/our-history.aspx>.

ahead of general southern opinion. The ultras would not be unleashed until after the Compromise of 1850 had been passed.<sup>30</sup>

Of all antebellum institutions apart from slavery, the 1860 Democratic convention in Charleston had been especially noteworthy. There was no way to discuss the coming of civil war without touching on it. James Leonidas Murphy, an API graduate and assistant instructor at Auburn, chose Alabamians' roles at the convention for his 1905 meeting paper. Murphy's paper was as much a primary source compendium as an analysis. He included the majority and minority reports of the convention and, like Herndon and Yonge, stuck the full text of the Alabama Platform in his footnotes, then simplified its key points in the main text. Either these three presenters independently chose the same format, or, more likely, they were specifically coached by Petrie to elucidate southern ultras' writings. Naturally Murphy extensively cited Yancey's convention speeches, Montgomery newspaper reports, and Sutton Scott's memoirs. Contra to Herndon and Yonge, Murphy argued that Yancey and the other ultras who walked out were no more radical than the average Alabamian. Keeping with the standard historical view, Murphy portrayed the party split in Charleston as "the severing of the last tie" which "no doubt gave the Republican party its ascendancy." He believed that "if the disruption...could have been prevented, the Republicans might have been defeated and the great Civil War might have been deferred, if not averted."<sup>31</sup>

One touch that set Murphy apart was his annotated engagement with the historiography. He rated Rhodes' treatment of the convention "clear, but brief," while Horace Greeley's study

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<sup>30</sup>For more on the Nashville Convention, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion, Vol. I.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*: 245, 265-266.

had “more details and some extracts.” The prolific New Yorker Benson J. Lossing, Murphy thought, “writes with bitterness but gives many interesting facts,” whereas Hermann von Holst “discusses it vigorously from an unfriendly standpoint.” Edmund Wilson’s work described the convention “in fun [from] the point of view of a leader of the Republican party of that day.” Useful as these northern historians and leaders were, Murphy decided that the fairest treatment came from late Confederate vice-president Alexander Stephens’ memoirs.<sup>32</sup>

The papers Owen included in the *Transactions* were, on the whole, non-controversial. Presenters stuck to explaining why southern sectionalism had developed and southern states had seceded. They did not discuss slavery, wartime sufferings, or the post-bellum years. Their presentations were as reasonably objective as could be expected for the time and the setting. Of course each presenter took the southern point of view, but none except Garrett and Fleming became argumentative in their analyses. The pronounced emphasis on institutions---such as the antebellum commercial conventions and the 1860 Democratic convention---kept the society’s meetings relatively mild. Owen as editor also excluded at least one paper from the *Transactions* that easily might have stirred up passions, “Some Contemporary Comments on Reconstruction” by Auburn student Kate M. Lane. All things considered, the AHS’ journal addressed the southern past calmly.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>James Leonidas Murphy, “Alabama and the Charleston Convention of 1860,” *Transactions, Volume V*: 239n.

<sup>33</sup>“Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, June 14, 1902,” *Transactions, Volume IV*: 399.

The four *Transactions* volumes mostly comprised scholarly work, and volumes IV and V represented the acme of the format for the AHS.<sup>34</sup> Owen thought that he could popularize the work of the AHS by offering more accessible literature. Scrupulously cited, laboriously drafted, and couched towards academics, the *Transactions* papers did not quite serve that purpose. They were fair, unoffending, and cerebral---and so not nearly as enjoyable to a general audience. Regular Alabamians might be more interested in lively tales of danger and adventure, of drama and controversy, than in studies of antebellum commercial conventions and bloodless, even-tempered politicians.

Back during the 1899 meeting, Owen had proposed that the society create another periodical, “a quarterly magazine...the publication of which should not interfere with any of the [other] existing or contemplated publications.” By his own admission, he was not putting forth a new idea. The AHS had already run one magazine, the *Alabama Historical Reporter*, back in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The folding of the *Reporter* had had to do with the society’s difficulties, not the magazine’s content or sales. Owen had judged the time was right to start another magazine, again with him as editor. As Owen expressed it, “it should contain institutional studies and papers, original documents, family histories and biographies, and notes and queries.” Members would get free copies of the magazine, which as described sounded

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<sup>34</sup>David D. Van Tassel and James A. Tinsley have argued---perhaps unfairly in many cases---that society journals collectively deteriorated as a medium by the middle of the twentieth century: “The ponderous volumes of [state historical society] proceedings, once packed with articles and source materials, are now starved skeletons...or have disappeared entirely in favor of a skimpy account of meetings and finance hidden in the back pages of the organization’s journal,” “Historical Organizations as Aids to History,” in *In Support of Clio*, 142-143.

much like the *Transactions*, while non-members “should bear a subscription price equal to annual dues.” Owen’s resolution passed.<sup>35</sup>

Once Owen joined the Alabama History Commission, he had had to re-evaluate some of his time commitments. While drafting the minutes of the 1900 meeting, he felt it “proper to explain that...the inauguration of a magazine by the Society...was not done owing to lack of time by the Secretary in which to edit and generally look after the publication.”<sup>36</sup> Owen still claimed that he would publish something; the only variable was time. Then, he became director of the ADAH and his plan went on the backburner once more. Owen said nothing about creating a magazine for the AHS for the next three years. In the 1904 secretarial report, he acknowledged that although his spirit had been willing, “the time never seemed opportune for actually launching it.” On reflection, it seemed to Owen that two AHS publications would be one too many. He asked the society’s members “whether it will not be advisable for us to close our series of *Transactions* after vol. v, and begin, as soon as practicable the publication of a quarterly journal...devoted to the publication of materials similar to what has been already put forth, and also a miscellaneous class of minor materials which have no way of appearing except in a periodical.”<sup>37</sup>

This description was as vague as the one prior. Owen never explained precisely how different the AHS magazine would be from the *Transactions*. What was more important, he had by that time already tried and failed to run a magazine himself, as will be discussed in the next

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<sup>35</sup>“Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, June 19, 1899,” *Transactions*, Vol. III: 19.

<sup>36</sup>“Proceedings of the Semi-Centennial Meeting of the Alabama Historical Society, June 18, 1900, *Transactions*, Vol. IV: 39.

<sup>37</sup>“Proceedings of the Annual Meeting for 1904, Held January 13, 1905,” *Transactions*, Vol. V: 18.

chapter. On reflection, Owen decided not to take up such a task again. For once he reined in his temptation to keep starting new things.

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What finally killed the new magazine plan, however, was the inexorable decline of the Alabama Historical Society, which became all but defunct later that year after it held its last meeting. Ironically, the success of the ADAH had produced an existential crisis in the AHS, for Owen's department necessarily usurped the society's first mission, to collect records. As early as 1901 Owen had foreseen that the society might wither in the shadows of the archives. He admitted in that year's secretarial report that "the creation of the Department, it would seem, has rendered unnecessary the further work of the collection of books and historical material by the Society." The redundancies of the society's mission were obvious to Owen. "It is useless to duplicate collections," he pointed out, and moreover, "divided energies can not be productive of the best results." The ADAH would have "the prestige of the State," "suitable quarters," and "salaried officials."<sup>38</sup> Against these the society could only muster best intentions.

"But what of the future of the Society?" Owen wondered aloud. He did not suggest that it should disband. Rather, "it should continue, but for only a part of its original objects." Record collection being the province of the ADAH, the "true mission" of the AHS "should be two-fold: The affiliation of a body of historical students through its membership, and the publication of work." In other words, the AHS must follow Owen's Alabama Plan, graciously ceding its old archival primacy while encouraging scholarship and historical-mindedness amongst Alabamians.

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<sup>38</sup>"Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, June 3, 1901," in *Transactions, Volume IV*: 252.

Of the two responsibilities, Owen thought recruitment would matter more in the long term: “The larger the membership the more valuable the Society would become, inasmuch as the number of the publications which could be issued would be largely augmented. With the headquarters in Montgomery a regular series of monthly meetings could...be inaugurated, and thus interest greatly strengthened.”<sup>39</sup>

Owen’s confidence that the AHS would flourish without his direction was in retrospect a whistling in the dark. No one could match his workload as secretary, and as Owen pulled back to focus on directing the ADAH, the society, to his alarm, slowly lost traction. Worrisome language began to slip into Owen’s secretarial reports: “woulds” and “coulds” gave way to “musts” by 1903. Owen declared that the AHS “must stimulate influence in behalf of history and must create and foster a public opinion favorable to...every historical activity.” The ideal approach would be to hold “a regular series of monthly meetings” in Montgomery. At every meeting, “papers...can be presented, followed by discussions and volunteer conferences on a variety of subjects.” The society should also dial back its scholarly tone, Owen argued, for “while in a certain sense [meetings] will be formal and academic, they will”---here Owen probably meant to say, “they *should*”---“be open to the participation of all members” of the community, especially “a large number of gentlemen and ladies.”<sup>40</sup> Apparently Owen wanted the AHS to act like a rotary club or a circuit Chautauqua if that was what worked best.

Despite his published concerns, over the next few years the society became a lesser priority for Owen. He began spending more time at meetings of other organizations, such as the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>“Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, December 22, 1903,” Ibid: 580.

Tennessee Valley Historical Society and religious organizations like the North Alabama Conference Historical Society of the United Methodist Church. A short post in the *Wilcox Progressive Era* had Owen still supervising the AHS in 1910, five years after its last documented meeting, but the nature of his work was unspecified. Officers were duly elected for that final meeting in 1905, while the committees reported that they had nothing to say. Cunningham read his “Historical Interpretation” paper, seven new members were inducted, and within two hours the chair rapped the gavel. Owen’s report lamented “the absence of specific work...[resulting] in a condition of apathy.”<sup>41</sup> So far as the AHS was concerned, the secretary had by that point succumbed to the same affliction. Aimless and unsupported, the hard-luck Alabama Historical Society shut down once more, never to revive again under that name.

In time, a phoenix rose from the ashes. The Alabama Historical Association would form in 1947 at the behest of Birmingham businessmen with historical avocations. It would be “from its outset...a cooperative effort of professional historians that welcomed new membership from the general public,” just as Thomas Owen had wanted with the AHS. The association would enjoy a particularly close relationship with the archives department: Marie Owen nominated most of the initial members.<sup>42</sup>

Owen would have applauded the formation of the Alabama Historical Association. Its work was his work: research, scholarship, and publications of course, but no less importantly than these, popular programming. Before considering Owen’s public service work however, we must examine the other publishing arenas he oversaw.

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<sup>41</sup>*Wilcox Progressive Era*, February 17, 1910; “Proceedings of the Annual Meeting for 1904, Held January 13, 1905, *Transactions*, Vol. V: 18.

<sup>42</sup>Claire M. Wilson, “Alabama Historical Association,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, January 25, 2011, accessed March 19, 2010, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3010>.

## 9. Owen Publishes, Part II: Newspaper articles and *The Gulf States Historical Magazine*

The publication plans that Owen nurtured went beyond the Alabama Historical Society and its *Transactions*. Scholarly journals had a limited readership anyway. Owen wanted to reach a greater number of people through what his department published both officially and via the state press. There were also opportunities to print historical studies in the private sector, as Owen eventually came to realize.

Most of the ADAH's official publications were stipulated in the act creating the department. Owen had to provide an "Annual report of the Director," the *Official and Statistical Register*, "the State's official records and other historical materials," and Alabama's Confederate service records. Owen further notified the board of trustees in 1901 that he had assembled "a series of Alabama Local History Sketches, embracing a number of reminiscent and historical articles which have from time to time appeared in newspapers."<sup>1</sup> All these were existing publications Owen wanted to make widely available, not new works he had commissioned.

After a few years the collection process stabilized, giving Owen more time to think about how his department could organize publications. He consulted with historians Fleming and Petrie to determine the best arrangement, and in 1905 rolled out a new schema for the board. There would be thirteen different series, the first five embracing "Administrative Forms," "Circulars," "Bulletins," "Annual Reports," and the *Register*. Assemblages of "State Papers" and "Alabama Local History" would constitute series 7 and 8. Users could access a catalog of

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<sup>1</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1901," n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

the department's published and manuscript holdings through series 6. Series 12 would deal with internal memos, and series 13 with the department's press pieces.<sup>2</sup>

Three of the new series were to offer either original historical work or extracts from or finding aids for primary sources. Series 9 covered "War Histories"---"Indian," "Mexican," the notably styled "War of Secession," and "Spanish-American." Series 10, entitled "Manuscript Series," pertained to the department's oldest collections of personal writings, including the papers of historian Albert Pickett, poet Alexander Meek, and territorial and early state politicians Charles Tait, John Coffee, William Bibb, and John Walker. Owen would publish new studies in series 11, "Miscellaneous Studies in Alabama History." He already had lined up four books: "Forty Years of Alabama History," John W. DuBose's examination of Reconstruction; DuBose's biography of Confederate General Joseph Wheeler; a history of the state's constitutional conventions; and Owen's own "History of the Alabama Newspaper press."<sup>3</sup>

Owen anticipated board resistance to his ambitious plans. "You are prepared to say," he told the trustees, "that this...will involve the expenditure of a considerable sum of money." So it might, but Owen wanted to press ahead anyway. He was certain that "the amount will be comparatively small." Moreover, some money "must ultimately be spent" in publication to justify the department's legislative appropriations. This was no time for keeping quiet about money, he warned the board, for otherwise the men in the capitol might get used to withholding extra funds. Indeed Owen favored "candidly appealing to the Legislature for a sum sufficient to

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<sup>2</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1905," 5-6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

get the principal volumes of each series under way, and for the completion of several of them.”<sup>4</sup> The board, opting for a more modest publication plan, scrapped all but the first five projected series. Undaunted, Owen kept coming up with even more elaborate publication plans for the department, none of which made it from penciled outline to funded project. One undated plan called for fifteen series. Series 1 through 3 remained the same as before, but Series 4, “Catalogues,” ran to half a dozen sub-points. The sixth (“Subject Lists”) further separated to allow topical bulletins for “General American,” “The South,” “The Negro,” “Genealogies,” “War of Secession,” “Anthropology,” and “Alabama.” Owen added new series exclusively for “Alabama Colonial and Provisional Records,” “Alabama Territorial Records,” “Alabama Legal History,” “Aboriginal and Indian History,” “Studies and Collections,” and “Historical and Patriotic Societies.” At the least, with this plan archives users could access a shelf’s worth of bibliographies and contact information.<sup>5</sup>

Another unfinished publication plan appeared in 1907. The director kept most of his 1905 outline, making a few minor yet significant changes to some of the series. Series 9 was no longer to be called “War History Series.” Now it was specifically “Confederate War History Series.” Owen also penciled out prospective volumes in this series for Native American and Mexican-American war records while keeping those for “War of Secession” and “Spanish-American.” Because a few aging veterans of 1861-1865, men such as Joe Wheeler, also had served in 1898-1899, and because the war with Spain had accelerated North-South reconciliation, Owen might have mentally connected the two conflicts. He also planned to create

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>“Tentative Outline of the Official and Historical Publications of the Alabama State Department of Archives and History,” n. p., from *Ala. Dept. of Archives and History Suggestions for Work Processes, etc.*, Classification, SG016721, AF-TO, ADAH.

an unnumbered series for biographies of prominent Alabamians. Owen specifically listed a study of the life of ex-Confederate general, United States senator, and probable Klansman John Tyler Morgan, which he planned to research and write himself. Other antebellum, wartime, and post-bellum figures, including Dixon Hall Lewis, Clement Clay, Robert E. Rodes, Jabez L. M. Curry, and John C. C. Sanders, would likewise be represented in the series.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately nothing came of this plan either.

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Owen did not require board approval or legislative appropriations to publish a few historical studies here and there, however. After all, he had the department's regular column in the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Several histories of Confederate regiments appeared under the ADAH banner head in the *Advertiser*, as noted in previous chapters. Beyond those unit narratives, Owen thought the column could serve a useful purpose for the archives by "diffusing dat[a] in reference to important topics in the history of the State, as well as on related subjects." For Alabama, the Louisiana Purchase was one such topic. When the centennial of the purchase approached in 1901, Owen selected DuBose to write a two-part account about it. More than a history, DuBose's article was intended to give "a full review of the [published] authorities and early references" about the purchase.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Memo book from 1907/03/02 to 1909/03/02 relating to the work of the ADAH, n. p, SG016717, AF-TO, ADAH. For the importance of the Spanish-American War in building reconciliation sentiment, see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, and Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>"Alabama Department of Archives and History, No. 5," *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 25, 1901.

DuBose did as Owen had bid. Part one of his article followed in sequence the rather mind-numbing history of correspondence between the American and French governments over the Louisiana territory. DuBose salted the narrative with block quotes drawn from a plentitude of published sources. In part two, which picked up with congressional debates over the purchase, DuBose turned enthusiastically pro-southern, as was his wont. “The sectional battle,” pronounced DuBose, “that began with Plymouth Rock and Jamestown, brought over by sworn enemies in England...resumed its fury on successive issues and pretenses begotten of the Louisiana Purchase.” It was hardly worth adding that the North was to blame. Northern statesmen had done all they could to keep Thomas Jefferson from acquiring Louisiana; and when they failed in that endeavor, they had hamstrung settlement of the territory to keep white Southerners from benefiting by it. DuBose declared that through the Missouri Compromise the North had so completely conquered the Louisiana Purchase that their “books abound[ing] in allegations of the ‘encroachments of the slave power’” into the west were revisionist rubbish.<sup>8</sup>

The old Confederate veteran, as it turned out, had a knack for turning nearly every piece of writing he handled into an occasion for southern defiance and vituperation of know-it-all Yankees. DuBose demonstrated this skill yet again when Owen turned over to him all of column “No. 9” (September 22, 1901) for a book review. The book in question was Greenough White’s *Memoir of Bishop Cobb*. DuBose poured out a “full mead of praise” to the Massachusetts Episcopalian clergyman for “giv[ing] us a narrative of unsurpassed English literature in its line.” He considered White’s remembrance of Nicholas Hamner Cobb, the former Episcopalian bishop of Alabama who relocated to Ohio before the war, “a brilliant little book” and “the best style of biographical narrative.” That said, DuBose could not help but take issue with White’s attempt to

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<sup>8</sup>“No 8 - Louisiana Purchase (Concluded),” *Ibid.*, September 15, 1901.

“misrepresent, eloquently and industriously, the social and political life and prospects of the people of Alabama.” He thought perhaps that White had been trying to appeal to “a purulent political bias in the book market.” On the other hand, White might actually believe the hateful things he had written about states’ rights ultras and secession, which Cobb had condemned. Either way, DuBose decided that White’s offense was serious enough to require the insertion of his own sketch of Cobb, running for more than two-thirds of the column. It was properly genealogical, hagiographical, and blessedly free of White’s references to politics.<sup>9</sup>

“Pivotal Facts In The National Life Of The Confederate States,” an unnumbered column that appeared in the *Advertiser* the following month represented DuBose’s final newspaper piece. Partisan memories of the war years were in the air as the new constitution approached ratification. In his article, DuBose vented his feelings and championed the developing Lost Cause interpretation of the war under the pretext of clearing up misconceptions about the ““War Between the States.”” First and foremost, DuBose weighed into a developing historical discussion by judging the preceding appellation for the war the only correct one. “Civil war” denoted a coup, he claimed, and “War of the Rebellion” was worse yet. The Confederacy had been a legitimate member of the international family of nations, not an unlawful combination as described by Lincoln in April 1861. Davis and the Confederate Congress had declared war, imposed taxes, written a constitution, chosen a flag, and sent abroad diplomats---all characteristics of an established state. Confederate soldiers such as DuBose had therefore fought on behalf of the Constitution, with a cause justified as far back as the Magna Carta. DuBose would have none of the argument that Lincoln had been duly elected president over the entire country either. Instead, he contended that, based on President Andrew Jackson’s 1833 stance

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<sup>9</sup> “No. 9 – Prof. Greenough White’s Memoir of Bishop Cobb,” Ibid, September 22, 1901.

towards states nullifying federal law, northern states with their anti-slavery Personal Liberty Laws had violated the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Their votes should not have counted in the Electoral College, and therefore all votes cast for Lincoln were null and void. Further, DuBose allowed no moral equivalence between the two sides. The North had acted like “a self-constituted and revengeful philanthropist” by emancipating southern slaves and “imperial[ing] honest government” via the “bastard” Fifteenth Amendment. The South had fought for nothing more than honor and defense of home. And as for the enslaved, DuBose remembered that they “grew steadily in mind and morals and decade by decade learned to weigh and renounce the allurements of the New England emissaries constantly among them.”<sup>10</sup> All in all, it was a Lost cause tour de force.

DuBose published all these ardently pro-Confederate pieces under the ADAH banner head with Owen’s approval. We do not know whether Owen preferred it this way, or whether he reasoned that however intemperate, DuBose’s articles were better than no articles at all. Considering the *Advertiser*’s readership, no one was likely to complain about what DuBose the Confederate guard dog wrote. And certainly pro-northern or emancipationist article writers would have been hard to find in early twentieth century Alabama. By allowing to write on behalf of the department more often than any other press contributor, however, Owen nevertheless displayed his archives’ connection to the Confederate cause.

After a year of running newspaper columns, the director was itching to expand his publishing initiatives into another medium. In the spring of 1902, Owen came up with the idea

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<sup>10</sup>“Pivotal Facts In The National Life Of The Confederate States,” Ibid, October 20, 1901. For the many contentions over the naming of the war and how this intersected with the Lost Cause, see Gaines M. Foster, “What’s Not in a Name: The Naming of the American Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8 (September 2018): 416-454.

of editing an independent periodical. He told George Petrie that this “bi-monthly journal” would “be devoted to history, literature, and criticism, with especial reference to the region known as the Gulf States, and adjacent territories.” Issues of the *Gulf States Historical Magazine*, as Owen planned to call it, would run from 50 to 100 illustrated pages.<sup>11</sup> Joel Campbell DuBose would serve as business manager and co-editor. The germ of this idea had been with Owen since his Washington sojourn, if not earlier. Now that Owen was a well-known figure in historical and archival circles, it was time to implement.<sup>12</sup>

Clear, accessible writing was what Owen aimed to give the reading public. The *Gulf States Historical Magazine* would, according to an Atlanta newspaper blurb, “provide an authentic history for the student, who needs something besides dates and the briefest of facts to make a lasting impression.” It was also, said a writer in the *Selma Times*, “devoted to the history literature and antiquities” of the Deep South. Coverage was to be thoroughly regional. Owen had recruited “a representative in the form of the most widely known historical writer” of “every city on the Gulf.” Too, there would be “special departments of genealogy, Confederate history, and notes and queries,” remarked the *Montgomery Journal*. Several other newspapers highlighted the magazine’s Lost Cause angle. A Birmingham paper, for instance, noted that “special attention will be given to Confederate history.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps these papers assumed that Owen, as a member of the SCV, would naturally focus on Confederate topics.

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<sup>11</sup>Owen to Petrie, April 15, 1902, Correspondence, Series 3, Petrie Papers, Special Collections, Auburn University.

<sup>12</sup>“The establishment of a state department of history has been followed by a remarkable awakening of interest in historical studies. One of the outcomes is to be...the Gulf States Historical Magazine,” *Alabamian*, June 6, 1902.

<sup>13</sup>“The Gulf States Historical Magazine, a Southern Journal With a Future,” Atlanta, n. p., n. d., Thomas M. Owen, Jr. Scrapbook, 1906-1912, Box 12, Owen Papers, ADAH; “Alabama Magazine,” “To Launch New Magazine,” *Selma Times*, May 30, 1902; *Montgomery Journal*, May 29, 1902; “Magazine to Be Started in Montgomery,” *Birmingham News*, May 28, 1902; “Paper Devoted to Alabama History,” *Birmingham Age-Herald*, May 28, 1902.

Owen wanted to popularize southern history without veering into fiction or moralizing on current events. Acceptable materials, as noted in the frontispiece to the second volume, would include “Carefully prepared historical papers,” “Hitherto unpublished documents,” “Genealogies and genealogical notes,” “Short articles on minor topics,” “Historical news,” “Notes and queries,” “Book reviews and periodicals,” and “Pertinent illustrations.” The editors would accept “nothing...that is not absolute historical fact.” Nor would Owen or Joel DuBose allow political or sociological commentary to slip in. Their magazine “deigns to be prophetic, and is only a chronicle of events that have actually contributed to history making.”<sup>14</sup>

Correspondence in the ADAH vaults does not show the process by which Owen got into touch with writers. We must assume that his burgeoning national fame as the first state archival director, plus his personal networks in the AHA, the SHA, and perhaps with the Southern Democrats as well, had provided these contacts years before. However Owen assembled material for the *Gulf States*’ inaugural publication, he did so with characteristic rapidity: Issue No. 1 of volume I appeared in July 1902, featuring seven short articles. There was a genealogical piece by Owen, a list of “Postmasters of the Principal Cities of the Gulf States” and another of “Texas Newspaper Files in the Library of Congress,” an edited letter series from the early nineteenth century Mississippi Territory, an article on French colonial settlement along the Mississippi, and an antebellum antiquary’s reminiscence.

Finally, there was yet another Lost Cause diatribe from the unreconstructed John DuBose. He entitled his article “The Tragedy of the Commissariat.” DuBose pretended to

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<sup>14</sup>Frontispiece, *The Gulf States Historical Magazine* 2 (July 1903); “The Gulf States Historical Magazine, a Southern Journal With a Future,” n. p., n. d., Owen Papers, ADAH; “Paper Devoted to Alabama History,” *Birmingham Age-Herald*, May 28, 1902.

analyze the breakdown of the Confederacy's supply and shipment bureaus, but in reality, the article was an indictment of Jefferson Davis for losing the war. The Confederate president had not minded the store, turning a blind eye to state governors hoarding supplies while Lee's army starved in the trenches at Petersburg. Lee had known Davis was hindering him but nobly withheld his complaints. Secretly, DuBose believed that "there was the best reason for the belief that Lee was indignant [with Davis], if not resentful, at the disastrous interference with his work." DuBose went on to argue the fantasy that that the surrender at Appomattox was forced on Lee by his own subordinates. Could Lee have foreseen the horrors of Reconstruction, he would never have laid down his sword. By introducing this latter point, drawn from a single post-bellum reminiscence, DuBose helped ensure that Lee, the "Marble Man," remained utterly blameless for Confederate defeat.<sup>15</sup>

Issue No. 2 in October featured fewer but longer articles with more wartime and post-bellum topics. Confederate memoirist W. A. Alexander contributed a reminiscence of the submersible CSS *Hunley*, originally printed in the New Orleans *Picayune*. Alexander had served as member of a test crew for the *Hunley*. Built in Mobile Bay in 1862, it had disappeared during its only combat mission in February 1864, when it sank the Union blockade vessel USS *Housatonic* with a spar torpedo off Charleston, South Carolina. Besides explaining how the crew had operated her, Alexander recounted the three occasions when the boat had sunk on

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<sup>15</sup>John W. DuBose, "The Tragedy of the Commissariat," in *Gulf States* 1 (July 1902): 31. The general historical view of the Davis-Lee relationship is one of confidence and trust, e.g., William C. Davis, "Davis and Lee: Partnership for Success," in Davis, *The Cause Lost*, and James M. McPherson, *Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis as Commander in Chief* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014). Steven Woodworth dissents from this view in *Davis & Lee at War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995). Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, contends that Lee did not accept Confederate defeat or Reconstruction with as much dignified resignation as his early biographers, especially Douglass Southall Freeman, would have us believe. On Lee's "Marble Man" image, see Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Alan T. Nolan, *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Lee Through His Private Letters* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).

practice dives with the loss of all hands and hypothesized on why it had sunk. His descriptions of the *Hunley's* claustrophobic quarters remained one of the few available sources on the *Hunley* until the wreckage was discovered in 1995.<sup>16</sup>

Walter Fleming followed Alexander with an article on post-bellum religion in Alabama, taken from his ongoing dissertation. Pro-southern denominational histories were the principal sources of Fleming's study, and most probably came from the bookshelves of the ADAH. Alabama's churches were by Fleming's description prostrate after the war: "all...the organizations were more or less demoralized. Property was destroyed; there was no money. It was a question whether some of them could survive the terrible exhausting." Worse, self-righteous Northern missionaries had headed South and made themselves obnoxious in Alabama by trying to take over churches' leadership through presbytery counsels, pushing African Americans to found separate churches, and treating all white southern Protestants as apostates who had "sinned knowingly in slavery and in war." What more could white Alabamians have expected, Fleming asked, given that "'Reconstruction' in the church was closely related to 'reconstruction' in the state, and was so considered at the time by reconstructionists of both"? Southern political defeat had never broken southern religious tenacity. "There was a Solid South in church as well as in politics," Fleming concluded.<sup>17</sup>

Fleming's article could hardly have offended anyone other than surviving old-line northern clergymen from the 1860s. In contrast, former Alabama legislator, Confederate officer, and Redeemer John W. Inzer's angry reminiscence in issue 3, entitled "How the News of the

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<sup>16</sup>The *Birmingham News*, "A Notable Number," October 13, 1902, considered this particular article "of more than passing interest" and "a fine story."

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, 127.

Assassination of President Lincoln Was Received By The Confederate Prisoners on Johnson's Island, in April 1865," had the potential to be more controversial. The "blue-gray gush" of reconciliation in the Gilded Age, Inzer complained, had enshrined Lincoln as a magnanimous second Washington worthy of white Southerners' admiration. Yet for those like Inzer languishing in northern POW camps at the end of the war, Lincoln's death had been little cause for grief. Some, indeed, had celebrated. "The news at once spread like 'wild fire' throughout the prison," Inzer remembered, "and cheer after cheer went up for a short while [which] reminded us of what we had often heard on the field of battle." They largely had considered Lincoln as "a tyrant, a wolf in sheep's clothing, and...that his love for the negro was so great and fanatical that he would have done all that he could to have made the white people...servants of the colored race." Inzer himself called Lincoln's assassination "Providential."<sup>18</sup>

All in all, the magazine format gave Owen more content freedom than he had had with the *Transactions*. Just as the *Gulf States* editor could allow Lincoln's excoriation, he could encourage a historical paean to Yancey. Owen first turned to nephew Hamilton Yancey for a sketch. His inability or unwillingness to help opened the door to another *Gulf States* contributor who was more than ready to take up the work. The irascible John DuBose thus submitted a two-part tribute to Yancey.<sup>19</sup> Part one appeared in issue no. 4, picking up the story in the aftermath of the Mexican War. As per usual with this writer, the "earnest," "deep-believing" Yancey and his fellow ultras had been right, southern moderates had been wrong, and the Yankees had been a

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<sup>18</sup>John W. Inzer, "How the News of the Assassination of President Lincoln Was Received by the Confederate Prisoners on Johnson's Island, in April 1865," *Ibid* 1 (November 1902): 194-196.

<sup>19</sup>Owen to Hamilton Yancey, April 15, 1902, *Gulf States Historical Magazine*, SG016712, AF-TO, ADAH.

foul, hypocritical species. “The South was the victim,” DuBose declared. “The Abolition party...was the instrument.”<sup>20</sup>

Almost entirely an opinion piece, the article still used some source materials. Statistical data from the census records braced DuBose’s argument that secession had happened because the North had long wanted to crush and amalgamate the South. They had envied “the Southern people...for more than a century home bred, land proprietors, prosperous and happy...free alike from isms and paupers” and enjoying “principles of liberty as no other people had opportunity.” Greedy Yankee business moguls had pushed through a national tariff, primarily affecting southern states, to strengthen their section. Slave states had still kept growing at a greater rate, making Northerners more determined to squeeze them dry. Unable to nudge the tariff any higher, Northerners had elected a Republican president knowing the South would never stand for it. They had deliberately forced the Confederacy to form that they might inaugurate a war of conquest and plunder against a foreign country.<sup>21</sup>

Part two, published in March 1903, picked up with Yancey’s part in the war. Again, DuBose argued that the wise Yancey had known that the “South of 1860 [had] competency...to sustain a national existence on its merits.” It had better generals, a superior national military organization, capable naval commanders (albeit leading a miniscule navy), and a brave and warlike populace. Unfortunately Yancey’s (and DuBose’s) bugbear, Jefferson Davis, had been willfully deaf to his counsels. On every wartime matter, the Alabama fire-eater had proved his foresight, while the Confederate president had only proved his incompetence. Under Davis’

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<sup>20</sup>DuBose, “Yancey: A Study,” *Ibid* 1: 239, 245, 248.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid*, 248.

command, all the Confederacy's advantages, not the least Yancey's abilities, had been squandered.<sup>22</sup>

W. H. Blake's memoir "Coal Barging in War Times, 1861-1865" closed out the first volume of the *Gulf States* on a different note. Blake described the assembly of coal boats, the lay of the land along Alabama's major rivers, and the difficult rapids between the coal mines on the Coosa and the state's major war factories at Selma. With the author's near-ambush by Confederate deserters enlivening the narrative, the article pointed to a dangerous, internally-divided Confederacy that most Lost Cause apostles would scarce have acknowledged.

Owen selected a biographical piece, a memoir, and a collection of documents for the first issue of Volume II, issued in July 1903. The biography, written by Auburn student Sallie Fleming Ordway, was about John Bell. Candidate for the short-lived Constitutional Union Party in the 1860 election, the southern-born Bell was as far removed from Yancey as night from day. He had been a thorough moderate who charted his own, mostly pleasant course. Ordway maintained a straightforward, chronological narrative, and offered no critique of her subject's actions until dealing with the aftermath of Lincoln's election. Ordway's analysis of Bell's behavior was simple. "[Mr. Bell] was a Whig and a Union man," she wrote, "but he was a loyal Tennessean and a Southern statesmen, and while he loved he Union, he loved his state more." Ordway thought northern commentators had erroneously blamed Bell for not averting secession by standing publicly with the Union in the winter of 1860-1861. These armchair historians "assign[ed] greater power and influence to Bell and his supporters than they possessed

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<sup>22</sup>DuBose, "Yancey: A Study (Concluded), 1 (March 1903): 316, 323.

in reality, and [they] also...imply an insincerity on Bell's part."<sup>23</sup> Bell had been incapable of insincerity, Ordway contended.

Ordway's Bell biography was hardly an article to excite great interest. Texan William Wood's memoir and Owen's document collection both dealt with a touchier subject, the South's "peculiar institution" and abolitionist efforts to eradicate it. Wood took a resigned, almost indifferent view of early abolition movements in the South. "It is a peculiar attribute of human nature," Wood asserted, "that at first sight we may abhor a thing, at second sight we tolerate it, and by frequent contact, we finally embrace it." People had become abolitionists simply by hearing abolitionist speeches often enough. There were, to be sure, the usual Lost Cause talking points in Wood's reminiscence. At one time "nearly every nation of the word...countenanced... the slave traffic," yet later, Wood complained, these same nations had blamed slavery on the South alone. Champions of anti-slavery had usually made a windfall on the institution before selling out their interests and developing convictions. Abolitionism had become more violent and intolerant, poisoning the minds of Northerners and making Southerners feel persecuted and misunderstood. Lincoln himself, Wood noted with regret, "could do nothing but respond to the popular sentiment of the Free states...however much against his will it might have been."<sup>24</sup>

Owen meanwhile assembled two letters and a Tuscaloosa newspaper notice for his article, "An Alabama Protest Against Abolitionism in 1835." The newspaper notice concerned an explosive anti-slavery pamphlet distributed in Alabama and the indictment of the pamphlet's author, New York editor Robert G. Williams, by a state grand jury for inciting slave insurrection.

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<sup>23</sup>Sallie Fleming Ordway, "John Bell," *Ibid* 2 (July 1903): 43, 44.

<sup>24</sup>William D. Wood, "Recollections of the Growth and Development of the Anti-Slavery Sentiment," *Ibid*: 20-21, 23.

The letters, written by Alabama governor John Gayle and New York governor William L. Marcy, revealed Gayle's long-winded demand that Williams be extradited to Alabama for trial, as well as Marcy's polite refusal to grant the extradition. Owen provided minimal commentary, preferring to let the sources speak for themselves. He did argue, however, that abolitionists "early foresaw the value of the press and the circulation of literature...not only as a means of arousing public opinion everywhere, but also as a means of irritating the South and Southern leaders." In consequence, "the South burning with resentment, became a practical unit in opposition to [this] propaganda."<sup>25</sup>

After submitting this article, Owen left the magazine solely in Joel DuBose's hands. He might have been happy to continue editing the *Gulf States*, had his job been flexible enough to allow it. Instead, increasing busyness compelled him to resign as editor just as the first issue of Volume 2 appeared. There was no indication of friction between Owen and DuBose, yet Owen's decision to sell out his interest did not help DuBose, who until then had intended "to devote a large part of his time traveling" from city to city to drum up sales.<sup>26</sup>

Owen remained in close contact nonetheless, probably helping DuBose discover prospective writers. The return of Fleming with three more articles taken from his dissertation was almost certainly Owen's doing. Fleming's first article, "The Formation of the Union League in Alabama," appeared in the second issue in September 1903. The League's biracial, cross-class, patriotic stance had been a sham, Fleming argued. Only disreputable, traitorous Alabama whites had joined the League, and they hastily quit when Radical leaders from the North

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<sup>25</sup>Owen, "An Alabama Protest Against Abolitionism In 1835," Ibid: 26.

<sup>26</sup>"Editorial Announcement," Ibid 2; *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1903.

inducted large numbers of non-whites. African American Leaguers meanwhile had enjoyed marching, carrying guns, and making a ruckus for the Union in white neighborhoods, as the Radicals prodded them to do, but refused to ransack and pillage southern whites because at heart they loved their racial betters. In the end, Fleming noted contemptuously, the “[Union] League had served its purpose. It had completely alienated the races politically and made it possible for the outsiders to control the negro.”<sup>27</sup>

Fleming’s claim that the League had made the Klan necessary provided a handy transition point to his next submission, “The Ku Klux Testimony Relating to Alabama.” After extensively reviewing Congressional reports on the Klan, Fleming argued that the Klan commission had been set up to justify federal intervention in the 1872 elections, an unnecessary move since the Klan had since largely lain dormant. Once again, Fleming read the commission volumes predisposed to accept conservative (that is, anti-Reconstruction) white testimonies while discounting what carpetbag, scalawag, or African American witnesses had to say. Yet in fairness to Fleming, he did make two comparatively objective arguments about the Klan commission. Fleming noted that witnesses’ backgrounds figured into reports they made. “The material collected,” he wrote, “can be used with profit only by one who will go to the biographical books and learn the social and political history of each person who testified...Unless this is known, one cannot safely accept or reject any specific testimony.” Moreover, Fleming pointed out that if the commission had been organized to convict, it would

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<sup>27</sup>Fleming, “The Formation of the Union League in Alabama,” *Gulf States* 2 (September 1903), 89.

have obtained better results by sending operatives into northern and southwestern Alabama, rather than the central part of the state, where hostile witnesses were predominant.<sup>28</sup>

The last article from Alabama's leading Dunning Scholar beefed up issues 5 and 6, separately short but bound as one because by then the magazine was on its last legs. Fleming tackled Confederate conscription in Alabama, adding to the limited literature of a topic that Civil War scholars apart from Albert Burton Moore have largely avoided---and Moore, in fact, drew in part on Fleming's work when he later contributed *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy* (1924). Fleming contended that the First and Second Conscription Acts (April and October 1862, respectively) had been necessary to compel volunteer recruitment and keep the Confederacy's armies intact, but its monetary exemptions had provoked discontent towards what southern plain folk dubbed "a rich man's war, but a poor man's fight." Conscription bureaus themselves had often been ineffective and hardly worth the Confederate dollars spent staffing them. Where Fleming differed with Moore's later work was in his contention that conscription had created Alabama's scalawags and pushed them into an alliance with Union occupiers and Radical Republicans. "Thus the best men went into the army," Fleming argued, "never to return, and a class of people the country could well have spared, survived to assist a second time in the ruin of their country."<sup>29</sup>

Two memoirs and a short scholarly paper completed the stock of antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction topics in the *Gulf States'* second volume. Sutton Scott presented another lively story, this time regarding his experiences as a Confederate agent to the Native American

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<sup>28</sup>Fleming, "The Ku Klux Testimony Relating to Alabama," *Ibid* 2 (November 1903): 158.

<sup>29</sup>Fleming, "Conscription and Exemption in Alabama During the Civil War," *Ibid* 2 (March – May, 1904): 320.

nations, replete with character sketches, hazardous travels, and narrow escapes from Union patrols.<sup>30</sup> William Wood's brief recollections of war-time Texas were more thoroughly Lost Cause. He portrayed a white populace united for the Confederacy, tipped his hat to unreconstructed white femininity, and boasted that Texans had made the best Confederate troops. Overly general and bland, reliant on secondary sources, and short of personal details and anecdotes, Wood's article was not really a memoir.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Auburn student William Scroggs penned a summary of antebellum southerners' filibustering expeditions in the Caribbean that did not shy away from their connection to slavery's expansion.<sup>32</sup>

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Public appraisal of the *Gulf States Historical Magazine* was highly favorable at first. Alabama's press led the way with praise. The *Advertiser*, always willing to boast about Owen, trumpeted that "the editor...is making it an invaluable addition to our current literature." Everyone would get something out of the magazine, both "antiquarians and persons who are interested in Southern history" and "the occasional reader...and the student." The editor at the *Huntsville Weekly Democrat* heartily concurred, noting "this periodical fills a long felt want in the South, and deserves a liberal patronage." The *Tuskegee News* declared that Owen and DuBose "are doing a work which every family should appreciate." A columnist for the

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<sup>30</sup>Sutton S. Scott, "Some Account of Confederate Indian Affairs," Ibid 2.

<sup>31</sup>"Recollections of Judge Wm. D. Wood, of San Marcos, Texas," Ibid 2.

<sup>32</sup>William O. Scroggs, "Alabama and Territorial Expansion Before 1860," Ibid 2.

*Birmingham Age Herald* asked her readers, “Why could not the south support this first magazine as solidly as a ‘Stonewall’ of old gave service to our country?”<sup>33</sup>

Editors in neighboring southern states too professed to like what they saw. The *Pensacola News* stated that the magazine’s initial issue “gives abundant promise of permanent usefulness and its table of contents presents a collection of matter of intense interest to every reader.” The *Tampa Tribune* meanwhile predicted that Owen’s periodical “will be increasing interest,” as “all the picturesque, brave and inspiring stories of past endeavor in these States...will give a new impulse to...[Gulf state] readers.” The *Atlanta Constitution* was enthralled: “[It] is all that could be desired...It is most attractive in its physical makeup, and the papers...treat in a thorough, authoritative way subjects of southern history...the magazine abounds in historical information that is somewhat of a revelation...Certainly the article are fresh and have the merit of being based on original documents...The object of the publishers deserves a warm support.”<sup>34</sup>

In granting the magazine plaudits---“it...has already established a reputation for dignity, thoroughness, and interestingness---the New Orleans *Semi-Weekly Times-Democrat* also took the opportunity to scold “the Southern people.” They had long “disregarded what has been and what still is their plain and imperative duty...and let others write or speak [for] them.” “Like the Carthaginians,” the paper observed, “the Southern people have permitted unfriendly critics to write their history and like the Carthaginians also the Southern people have been not a little

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<sup>33</sup>“Gulf States Historical Magazine Is Now Out,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 15, 1902; “The Gulf States Magazine,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 18, 1902; *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, July 30, 1902; “Gulf States Magazine,” *Tuskegee News*, November 6, 1902; “Mrs John Writes of Gulf States Magazine,” *Birmingham Age-Herald*, July 29, 1902.

<sup>34</sup>*The Pensacola News*, July 15, 1902; “New Magazine,” *Tampa Tribune*, September 21, 1902; *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1903.

injured by the experiment.” For this neglect, the New South-minded editor blamed “the ‘ante-bellum regime.’” It was high time to do things differently, as the *Gulf States’* editors were already doing. If white Southerners did no more than get subscriptions, they would be on the right path. “It is not too much to say,” the *Times-Democrat* intoned, “that this magazine should be loyally supported by the people who are making and keeping the South worthy of [its] best traditions...It is an excellent magazine, and it deserves to wax in power and prosper.”<sup>35</sup>

Such pro-southern views are unsurprising, but did the *Gulf States Historical Magazine* give “special attention” to “Confederate history,” as the early press blurbs had claimed? Most articles did not pertain at all to topics associated with the Civil War. Readers uninterested in the war years could devour articles on Andrew Jackson’s place in American historiography, the Mississippi territory’s first law codes, southern state historical societies, Hernando de Soto’s expedition, Louisiana authors, Cherokee myths, Georgia’s Cumberland Island, and early Spanish missions in North America, to name only a few. Then again, the magazine’s wartime and post-bellum articles can hardly be compared in volume or fury to what the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, the *Confederate Veteran*, or any UDC publication provided at the same moment.

A better yardstick for the *Gulf States’* overall tone is found in Owen’s *Transactions*. In comparison, the Lost Cause quality of certain articles is more pronounced in the newer publication. John DuBose, Walter Fleming, and John Inzer were not afraid to rush in with their battle flags waving where the typical AHS contributor feared to tread. This is readily apparent in the two approaches to William Yancey. Petrie’s AHS article on the fire-eater was equitable and reasonably fair, while DuBose’s two-part magazine article was partisan and, in places, nearly

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<sup>35</sup>“The Gulf States Historical Magazine,” *Semi-Weekly Times-Democrat*, December 2, 1902.

hysterical. Fleming, who wrote for both the journal and the magazine, remained calm describing the Buford Expedition for the AHS, but turned stormier in his submissions to the *Gulf States*. At the same time, southern moderation, national pride, and peaceful Whig history--all worthwhile topics in the *Transactions*--had no place in the lineup for either volume of Owen's magazine. Maybe Owen figured that the only way his magazine would sell was if it took hard line, white southern positions on the Civil War era.

While they welcomed strident Civil War writings, however, Owen and Joel DuBose anticipated that topical variety would make the *Gulf States* more marketable. It might, in fact, have added to their burdens. There was no shortage of American periodicals with wide appeal in the early twentieth century. By setting up his own magazine, Owen became one more private publisher trying to make his way in an already overcrowded field. At the risk of speculation, he might have been thankful that managing the ADAH gave him a good reason to gracefully exit the commercial publishing world. That decision left a mess for DuBose, however. Forced abruptly to juggle editing, sales, and distribution, he found himself snowed under. DuBose tarried in Montgomery "thinking [it] the better place," until the fall of 1903. When "the inevitable [came] to pass," the *Advertiser* reported, DuBose transferred his headquarters to Birmingham. "I believe," he told the city *News*, "this is the better place for the publication," yet complained that the "transfer of the postal privileges" from Montgomery was "holding us back."<sup>36</sup> More likely lack of sales hurt; at \$3 for a yearly subscription, the magazine was not exorbitantly-priced, but not necessarily a bargain either.

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<sup>36</sup>"The Gulf States," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 23, 1903; "Moving Magazine To This City," *Birmingham News*, November 8, 1903; "Published in Birmingham," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 24, 1903.

DuBose finally made the painful decision to cancel the *Gulf States* before the fifth issue of volume 2. “The Editor regrets that its publication must be discontinued,” he informed readers, “but the money returns have not equaled the expense incurred, and private interests are too exacting to allow the time necessary to keep the MAGAZINE up to the standard of his judgment.” DuBose was too dedicated a scholar to believe the entire project had been time wasted. True, “there have been no money profits,” yet on the other hand he had been “repaid by contact and correspondence...by the enlargement of his intellectual stories, by a broader and more generous patriotism, and by the consciousness that the MAGAZINE has served a noble purpose in directing attention to the historical resources of the Southern states.”<sup>37</sup>

There was no final tally from DuBose of the total cost of trying to keep the *Gulf States* afloat. He merely told Owen in 1908 that he had spent “several hundred dollars.” For a time there was a slim chance for DuBose to recoup some of his losses by liquidating the remaining stock of issues. He dropped fifty dollars---a not inconsiderable sum in 1908---on “circulars, letter-heads, envelopes, &c” for a sales campaign pitched at “libraries throughout the country.” Presumably this did not work as DuBose had hoped. He also lamented the stringent contract he had made with Brown, for it had tied his hands when he wanted to dump back-issues. “I should have made [an] effort years ago,” he admitted to Owen, “to get libraries to take sets of the Magazine off my hands, but Brown...held as collateral the earlier numbers published, and I had to ‘grin and bear’ until the firm thought fit to turn loose.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>“Editorial Announcement,” *Ibid* 2: 309. The news was slow to travel. As late as 1909, Owen was still receiving letters and article submissions for the magazine, e.g., Owen to H. L. Hargrove, March 10, 1909, Correspondence.

<sup>38</sup>DuBose to Owen, April 8, 1908, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

The more DuBose thought more about the failure of the *Gulf States*, the more his bitterness increased. Whatever the magazine's drawbacks or the market's saturation, DuBose increasingly blamed certain subscribers for cheating him. Out of them all, DuBose unleashed his fury on a single Montgomery man who owed him six dollars. "C. P. Roquemore," DuBose thundered to Owen, "is a contemptible, black-hearted, lying s---o---b---," a great villain who

subscribed...beginning with our first number [but] never ordered the Magazine stopped, and I continued to send him to the close of volume II...He has many times named date of payment, and upon my calling upon him...or writing him or drawing on him through the bank he has for various and sundry reasons failed to meet his promise...he has put me to useless loss of time to visit his office, loss of cash in writing, and loss of casts in reporting...

His indifferent manner that he could not help it &c has invited me to bring him to law. If he is unable to pay, or if he is man of enough to refuse to pay, I will give him the six dollars. If he is haggling to get a cause to show temper that he may refuse to pay, I want to give it to him so that he will not doubt that it is sufficient, if an honest man can find in the impatient temper of one who has been repeatedly dallied with, an excuse for the refusal of payment of a debt...I have been patient in the belief that he was a gentlemen...I would like now to learn that he is only a natural scoundrel...I want you to see him for me...If there is any of the

gentleman in him, give him all the opportunity to maintain his dignity and self-respect. If he does not respond sensibly and courteously, present him the receipted bill, and read to him this letter...<sup>39</sup>

The director, wisely, kept out of it.

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There was hardly an archival or historical publication that Owen did not produce during his career. He released press notices, circulars, and bulletins, compiled official state registers, commissioned regimental histories, collected and printed scholarly papers, solicited and ran magazine articles, and in the down time gathered sources, edited, wrote, and occasionally published his own writings. Everywhere except in the registers, Owen promoted the Lost Cause viewpoint. How far that viewpoint went depended on the medium. In official and scholarly writings such as the regimental histories and the *Transactions* articles, Owen preferred some dispassion. In commercial publications Owen allowed and perhaps even encouraged pro-Confederate writers to cast off restraint.

Owen's accomplishments in publishing proved ephemeral, however, choked off by diminishing time and marginal money. One by one the press notices, regimental histories, scholarly papers, and magazine articles became fewer until they finally stopped. Only the

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<sup>39</sup>DuBose to Owen, June 24, 1908, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

ADAH circulars, bulletins, and registers continued, and only because they were funded by Alabama's legislature.<sup>40</sup>

Owen, however, was not discouraged by his failure to establish a regular publishing legacy. He kept his eyes on the most important thing in his portfolio---collections---and typically moved on to new fields. A wider and exciting world beckoned, outside the confines of Owen's cramped office, in the display cases of the capitol, and the locations where history had been made. Much more than an archivist and a writer, Owen was a public historian who aimed to take history from the archives to the people.

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<sup>40</sup>Market fickleness and copyright issues made Owen ever more circumspect about handling original studies as time went on. For instance, he turned down a chance to reprint James G. Randall's *The Confiscation of Property during the Civil War* (1913) as an augmented ADAH-sponsored publication because "it seems to be only one of probably two or three copies, and besides we have no assurance that it may not be published in future by the author," Owen to Arthur H. Clark Company, March 31, 1919, Correspondence, SG016703, AF-TO, ADAH.

## 10. Beyond the Archives: Owen, Public Programs, and Public History

There was nothing passive about Owen's directorship of the Alabama archives. Exemplifying what archival scholar Laura Millar calls an activist or interventionist approach to modern archival management, Owen wore himself out building up the ADAH. He pursued records, assistance, and funding as though everything depended entirely on his activity, because it did. Overt identification with the Lost Cause bolstered the department's popularity amongst white Southerners but hardly guaranteed its survival. A state-supported bureau of archives was yet a novel and untested idea, and Owen knew that to keep it as a going concern he had to continually prove its worth to the people of Alabama. "Not the least important of the duties which have engaged me," Owen reported to the archives' trustees at the start of his tenure, "has been a continuous effort at further popularization of the Department and its purposes." The fact of the matter was that "if [this] work is to develop as it should, the public must be kept interested in it."<sup>1</sup>

Maintaining public interest required far more of Owen than collecting, arranging, and making available materials, providing access to information, and encouraging scholarship and publications. Most Alabamians would probably never look through the records housed at the ADAH or pull books off its shelves. They touched history through other ways. If Owen wanted the support of that majority, he had to meet them where they were, figuratively and literally. His department had to display artifacts besides old papers, develop a physical footprint at historic

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<sup>1</sup>Laura A. Millar, *Archives: Principles and Practices* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2010); "Minutes and Annual Report, 1901," n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

sites outside the capitol, and otherwise work to popularize history. Owen could never confine himself to the specialties of archival work. He had to act as a public historian too.

Nowadays, public history is an established scholarly discipline and a regular line of employment. Scores of schools offer programs in public history, and tens of thousands of private and public organizations provide venues to practice it. In Owen's time, however, the field was still in the embryonic stages of its development, and indeed Owen---like many other early twentieth century historians---would not have known it by that name. What was called the practice of "history" at the turn of the twentieth century was quite narrow. It centered on white male scholars with degrees researching and writing, and talented white male amateurs penning books for general audiences. Both groups of historians generally scorned the principal arenas of modern public history---museums, historic parks and sites, non-educational institutions, and commemorative associations. Public history work was for amateurs, for antiquarians, and more than that, for *women*. It was too caught up in local and regional interests and too focused on things and places instead of texts. It was, in a word, too *popular* to be respectable.<sup>2</sup>

As is obvious, that kind of gender- and class-based elitism minimized the richness of popular historical practices. It also failed to consider the federal government's inadvertent parentage of public history through territorial acquisitions in the West. Federal officials started to claim and set aside large land areas during Reconstruction, initially believing that they would

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<sup>2</sup>Brundage, *The Southern Past*; Connerton, *How Societies Remember*; Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880-1980* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Gillis, ed., *Commemorations*; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Jackson Leers, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper & Row, 2010). Richard J. Cox's review essay, "Making the Records Speak: Archival Appraisal, Memory, Preservation, and Collecting," *American Archivist* 64 (Fall/Winter 2001): 394-404, draws several thought-provoking historical connections between strict archival work and public history.

provide settlement spaces and resource caches to fuel national economic growth. Soon they realized that the real value of many western lands, such as Yellowstone, was as natural, recreational, and contemplative areas for the people. Preservation of land supplanted exploitation as federal policy, although profit-minded western settlers and territorial governments were slower to make that switch. Fearful that a hands-off policy would free the public to gut their sites tree by tree, the federal government established the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916, with the mission to promote cultural rather than material values for federal lands. Park superintendents collectively latched onto historical education as the best means to their end. They built museums, established exhibits, gave presentations, and led tours to instill public appreciation as well as to keep visitors busy enough to not despoil the land. In this way, age-old popular ways of engaging with history, through sites, artifacts, and celebrations, were legitimized. Before too long, practitioners of the old ways aspired to equality with the academy.<sup>3</sup>

Owen did not have anything like the responsibilities, concerns, or budget of the federal government. At the same time, he understood that popular historical interest was a critical resource for his job. Tapping this resource for the ADAH meant more work for Owen, but not necessarily an extra burden. Owen already had one foot in public history through membership and sometimes leadership in a multitude of organizations. Owen also founded new organizations based on popular approaches to history, the most notable being the Native American-focused Alabama Anthropological Society. In order that the anthropologists might have a place of their own, Owen waged an unsuccessful centennial campaign to preserve the

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<sup>3</sup>Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Towards a New Genealogy of Public History* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). Collaborations between public and academic historians have since broadened so that today there are fewer distinctions between them. More pointedly, PhDs in the twenty-first century, facing a surfeit of competitors for a mere handful of academic positions, often end up as public historians.

1814 battlefield at Horseshoe Bend as a state park. And before he had an archives to direct Owen insisted that it should include a museum, as “there is nothing which will add so much to the public interest in our work as through some exhibition of an antiquarian character.”<sup>4</sup>

Many and varied as were Owen’s public history interests and activities, it is those relating to the Lost Cause that concern us here. White Alabamians’ popular interest in the Civil War, and particularly its Confederate aspects, was at the time greater than that of any other subject or period. Owen accordingly gave the people what they wanted, beginning with his museum collections.<sup>5</sup>

Owen first sought Confederate battle flags of Alabama units. There were many of them, he told Alabamians in his department’s second circular, because “Almost every company, battalion, regiment and brigade had its flag.” Surrendering Confederates saved some of them when they ripped them from the staffs and smuggled them home in 1865, such as those of Hilary Hebert’s 8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. Owen knew that many other banners were now in UCV, USCV, or UDC collections, or in private homes, and that their holders might gladly offer them to the ADAH. Most Alabama Confederate flags, however, had been captured during the war and ended up in on the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Owen reported that “Visitors to the capitols of many of the Northern States finds [sic] on exhibition...hundreds of the flags borne in battle by their soldiers.” Meanwhile, he asked, “What is to be found preserved in official

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<sup>4</sup>Finch, “Preserver”; Claire M. Wilson, “Horseshoe Bend National Military Park,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, December 10, 2010, accessed April 6, 2020, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2998>; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1901,” n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence. For the particulars of Owen’s role in the Alabama Anthropological Society see Alabama Anthropological Society Records, LPR151, ADAH. Horseshoe Bend became a national military park under NPS direction in 1959.

<sup>5</sup>On the endurance of white southern popular interest in, bordering on obsession with, the Civil War see Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

custody in the capitol building...at Montgomery[?]" The director thus called on white Alabamians to remove this "reproach" by helping him bring Alabama Confederate flags back home.<sup>6</sup> Implicitly he also asked Alabamians traveling north to gather intelligence on museum collections so he could politely plunder them.

Owen went on his own reconnaissance missions for flags. During a summer 1903 trip to the Midwest, he looked for a pre-war flag belonging to Company D (the Perote Guards) of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. Presented to the company by M. J. Crossley, a Perote resident, Federals captured the flag when the regiment surrendered on Island No. 10. Supposedly an Indiana regiment had taken the flag, prompting Alabama's leaders to contact that state's governor. After a brief correspondence with the governor's secretary failed to turn up the flag in the Indiana capitol museum, Owen turned to Edward McMorries for help. McMorries suggested that Owen personally contact Midwestern governors, starting with Ohio's, until he got a lead. Owen finally found the flag in 1903 in the Wisconsin Historical Society's headquarters, "in a glass case and fair well preserved, but the color...somewhat injured."<sup>7</sup>

Getting the Perote Guards' flag back to Alabama took some effort. It was not a question of overcoming the Society's unwillingness to part with the flag, but rather of first getting approval from the Wisconsin state legislature to transfer it to the care of the ADAH. Wisconsin lawmakers were out of session and would not return for business until January 1905. A bill to transfer the flag did not appear on the docket until that March. After the legislature passed the

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<sup>6</sup>*Circular No. 2, Flags and Relics of Alabama Commands in the Confederate States Army*, 1-3. This circular was reprinted in the *Canebrake Herald*, May 7, 1903.

<sup>7</sup>"An Ante-Bellum Reminiscence," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 8, 1903; "Flag of the Perote Guards," *Union Springs Herald*, June 10, 1903; "Flag of the Perote Guards," *Troy Messenger*, June 24, 1903; "Flag of the Perote Guards," *Troy Messenger*, August 9, 1905.

bill, delays continued. Veterans of the 18<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, credited with capturing the flag, objected when it was announced that their trophy would be returned to Alabama. They mobilized Wisconsin chapters of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the largest Union veterans' organization, to protest the Society's decision. Aware of the GAR's influence, the Society paused to attend to this fire in its rear. A letter from the Society's superintendent meanwhile assured Alabama Governor William D. Jelks that "what little opposition there is...comes from a few men who have not thoroughly considered the situation." The GAR's leadership finally went on record in favor of the transfer, and conferences between the Society and the disgruntled veterans secured their approval in April. The Wisconsin legislature then announced that it would send the flag as "an act of courtesy to a sister state, tending to strengthen not alone the friendship between our state and Alabama, but to some extent between all states north and south." In early August the Perote Guards flag arrived in Montgomery. "Now has come the end of a little squabble," the *Canebrake Herald* noted with approval, "that happily never went beyond the point of good nature and cordial fellowship."<sup>8</sup>

The return of Perote Guards' Confederate flag, the language framing its transfer, and the strident opposition to its relocation, did not occur in a vacuum, but rather exemplified a national trend. Importuned by white southern leaders, and wanting to foster further reconciliation between northern and southern whites after the war with Spain, northern and federal government leaders began shipping captured battle flags back to their regiments' home states at the start of the twentieth century. Every Confederate banner repatriated southwards was supposed to

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<sup>8</sup>"Will Get Flag," *Anniston Star*, March 25, 1905; "Flag Will Now Come," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 31, 1905; "Perote Guards' Flag," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 31, 1905; "Wisconsin Will Return The Flags," *Monroe Journal*, April 20, 1905; "Battle Flag Is Returned," *Canebrake Herald*, August 17, 1905; "Alabama Civil War Period Flag Collection," Alabama Department of Archives and History, updated October 25, 2006, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://archives.alabama.gov/referenc/flags/010a.html>.

represent a burying of the hatchet between victors and vanquished, a testament to the good working relationships of federalism, a sign of northern benevolence, and a proof of southern obedience. Unfailing politeness on the part of both sides scarcely concealed the rancor of the unreconciled minority, however. A number of Confederate veterans, and not a few unreconstructed New Southerners, believed they were merely getting back what was theirs, and did not feel inordinately grateful towards northerners for returning the flags. Many GAR chapters likewise protested the return of Confederate flags without their expressed approval, seeing the transfers as an unmanly submission to pressure from “rebels.” President Grover Cleveland’s unilateral 1887 attempt to return flags held by the War Department had so infuriated the GAR that he backpedaled and the flags stayed put until 1905, not coincidentally the same year that Owen secured his flag from Wisconsin.<sup>9</sup>

When it came to flags, Owen preferred playing the gracious gentlemen to the grabby irreconcilable. For the most part he quietly employed the assistance of others to find and relocate Alabama battle flags. The *Montgomery Times*, for example, informed Owen that a GAR museum in New York held the 14<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment’s flag. Through the persuasion of Mildred Dewey, the former wife of Union general William B. Hazen and current wife of United States naval hero George Dewey, Owen managed to get the flag of the 28<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment from the National Museum in Washington. A New Orleans woman who had

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<sup>9</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Gannon, *The Won Cause*; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*; Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*. Reporting on a 1905 congressional resolution to return flags, an Anniston newspaper decided that “a great change in sentiment of the people all over the country” made the matter less controversial than it had been during Cleveland’s administration, although the relative decline of the GAR’s numbers and political power offers another explanation, “The Battle Flags,” *Anniston Star*, March 3, 1905. Confederate flag transfers can still occasionally provoke heated feelings, as for example during the Civil War sesquicentennial, Brian Resnick, “150 Years After Gettysburg, Virginia and Minnesota Fight Over Confederate Flag,” *The Atlantic*, June 28, 2013, accessed March 30, 2020 <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/150-years-after-gettysburg-virginia-and-minnesota-fight-over-confederate-flag/313796/>.

visited the Military Service Institute Museum in New York reported to Owen through the UCV that the museum had a flag belonging to the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. Owen quickly secured the approval of the commanding officer at the museum to transfer the flag. An added acquisition stemming from this little victory was the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment's flag. Long kept in hiding by Colonel John Inzer, the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama's flag came in to Montgomery once he realized "he could not longer keep [it] away from the place it ought to be, amongst those of the other commands."<sup>10</sup>

Other banners of Alabama Confederate units came into the ADAH from veterans' organizations, state legislatures, and individual donors. A UCV camp donated a company flag for the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. GAR camps in Michigan and Ohio gave Owen flags for the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry and the "Selma Tigers" respectively. On a visit to New Orleans, Owen found the 34<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment's battle flag amongst a collection mistakenly sent there by War Department clerks, who had thought the flag represented a Louisiana unit. He reclaimed the flag from Louisiana Governor N. W. Blanchard without any trouble. The flag for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment came to Owen as a gift from one of its former captains, then serving as a representative in the capitol. The major of the 57<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry turned his regiment's flag over to Owen at a meeting of the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. One unusual Confederate flag Owen received was the naval pennant from the

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<sup>10</sup>"Flags Located By 'Times' To Come Back To Alabama," *Montgomery Times*, July 19, 1906; "Letter of Mrs. Dewey," *Wetumpka Weekly Herald*, September 7, 1905; "Old Flag Of 18<sup>th</sup> Is Back With Its Own," *Montgomery Times*, September 9, 1905; "Flag of Fifty-Eight Alabama," *Huntsville Morning Mercury*, May 31, 1906.

Confederate commerce raider CSS *Florida*, donated by a member of the United States consulate at Bermuda.<sup>11</sup>

Owen's charm, political connections, and prestige amongst professional historians helped him acquire additional flags. The Wisconsin Historical Society signaled its willingness to continue working with Owen by sending him a pamphlet listing names and images of all Confederate flags in its possession. Owen only had to select those he knew represented Alabama units and the Society would ship them---but only to Owen and the ADAH, not to any other state bureau or organization. Camps and chapters of the UCV, UDC, and USCV could not expect to receive any of the Society's artifacts. The *Huntsville Morning Mercury* understood the Wisconsin Society's concern for the artifacts in its charge and its intention to deal only with an organization like itself. "It is quite certain that...the society would be glad to return banners, flags, pennants, and pictures...to such States as they came from," the editor remarked, "if there was assurance that they would receive care and attention. It is hardly to be expected that they would be turned over to societies that have no State authority to hold such property."<sup>12</sup>

Recovering flags required money. Whatever Owen shelled out for shipping and incidentals was worth it to him. He was, in contrast, disgusted when flag holders such as Nelson Wilson tried to turn him into a mere buyer at auction. Wilson, an attorney in Washington, informed Owen that he had the regimental banner of the 18<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry and wanted \$100 for it. Owen would not bite; "the flag properly belonged to the State, and...we would not

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<sup>11</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report," 1903, 1904; "Historic Flag Put in Archives," *Southern Democrat*, November 28, 1907; "State Observations," *Canebrake Herald*, May 13, 1909; "Battle Flag Of 34<sup>th</sup> Ala.," *Montgomery Times*, March 15, 1906; *Canebrake Herald*, March 29, 1906; "Tattered War Flag," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 12, 1903; "Old Battle Flag Found," *Gadsden Daily Times-News*, December 16, 1910; "Confederate Naval Flag Is Preserved," *Citizen-Examiner*, December 21, 1911.

<sup>12</sup>"Flags and Letters," *Huntsville Morning Mercury*, May 26, 1906.

consider a purchase under any terms.” The two parties began haggling and Wilson dropped the price by less than half. Forty dollars was low enough to satisfy Owen’s conscience, so he sent Wilson the money and received the flag.<sup>13</sup>

Although he usually maintained a professional detachment, Owen did at least occasionally agree with Confederate heritage groups that the return of Confederate banners was a reason to celebrate. Working with the Sophie Bibb Chapter of the UDC, Owen planned to host a gala at the ADAH for the arrival of a package of twelve regimental flags and one brigade flag from the War Department. He thought there ought to be a public reception in his office and the archives library, followed by a “program recited [sic], consisting of speeches and talks and historical sketches of the tattered banners.” Veterans from the regiments represented by the flags should also be on hand to talk about their experiences. Unfortunately the package, arriving at the capitol earlier than expected, was dropped off unceremoniously outside the governor’s office, where it sat for several hours before anyone opened it. Caught napping, Owen and the Daughters were unprepared for their gala, and had to reschedule it for a later date in the House of Representatives chamber.<sup>14</sup>

Owen to be sure never acquired insignia for every Alabama Confederate unit, just as he never acquired documents, records, and narrative sketches for all of them. He did nevertheless gain a large number of flags, enough to fill a mahogany display case. Thirty-six Alabama Confederate battle flags “representing brigades, regiments, and companies” stood in the archives library by the end of 1908. Owen draped the flags “as to make a showing that all can

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<sup>13</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1916,” n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH.

<sup>14</sup>“To The Old Flags,” *Montgomery Times*, March 3, 1905; “War Department Returns State’s Confederate Flags,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 28, 1905.

understand, the organization, names and numbers [of the regiments] being plain.” The public approved. “Well-posted men say that the...archives has probably the best display of flags of the Confederacy in existence,” wrote the *Sumter Enterprise* in challenge to the primacy of the Confederate Museum in Richmond. Several other Alabama newspapers seconded the *Enterprise*’s claim.<sup>15</sup>

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Complementing the Confederate flags were images of people Owen deemed noteworthy Alabamians. He created a small gallery in the archives’ cramped space to “show the likenesses of all, approximately [all] of those men, and women as well, who have had a share in a large constructive way in the building of the Commonwealth.” His conception of constructiveness encompassed “great physicians, great divines, great pioneers, and great captains of industry.” More specifically Owen sought images of “Alabama historians, scientists, financiers, novelists, poets, industrial leaders, educators, journalists, political leaders,” but above all, “the principal officers of Alabama commands in the war between the States.”<sup>16</sup> Owen’s parameters and Alabama’s social and political structures ensured that every portrait Owen hung in the ADAH depicted an Anglo-American Protestant.

He hardly had to beg for images; there were already a number in hand before Owen opened the ADAH museum. Charter donors had sent Owen portraits of Confederate officers

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<sup>15</sup>“Valuable Relics These,” *Sumter Enterprise*, November 26, 1908; *Leighton News*, November 27, 1908. The press’ failure to list these flags makes it impossible to speculate exactly how Owen positioned them. He would probably have placed regimental flags in numerical order, but the arrangement of the brigade and company flags can only be guessed.

<sup>16</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1908,” n. p., Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH; *Bulletin No. 1*, 27.

Tennent Lomax, William W. Allen, Stephen D. Lee, Zachariah Deas, the ubiquitous Yancey, and members of the 1875 constitutional convention. Indeed so many images of ex-Confederates came in that Owen set up a “Confederate panel” on one side of the museum with depictions of Robert E. Lee and S. D. Lee, Deas, Owen collaborator Hilary Herbert, South Carolina antebellum firebrand Preston Brooks, and the staff of the 14<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. Besides the Confederate panel, the archives’ museum displayed a central portrait of Jefferson Davis in the last year of his life flanked by two portraits of Yancey, one at the cusp of his fame, the other showing him in his fifties. Neither of these dead Confederates would have wanted his image placed near the other, and one wonders what Yancey acolyte John DuBose thought when he saw the arrangement. The Confederate veterans who attended the museum’s formal opening---which Owen had purposefully scheduled to coincide with a UCV reunion in Montgomery---were not offended, but rather dumbstruck with reverence. “Each veteran held his hat reverently in his hand as he stood before the large...portrait of Davis,” the *Advertiser* reported. Some were brought to tears by the ““Jefferson Davis room”” and its collection of artifacts including a bedstead, a Mexican War sword, and some of Davis’ clothing from the war years.<sup>17</sup>

As far as portraits, Owen’s creed seemed to be to get as many as he could. Obviously with certain Alabamians, such as Yancey, more was always better. Owen notified the public in departmental column “No. 22” (January 5, 1902) that he although he had a life-size oil portrait of Yancey, a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> size photograph, and a steel engraving from DuBose’s biography, there had to be more Yancey images and he wanted them all, or at least facsimiles. The director even

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<sup>17</sup>“Alabama Department of Archives and History, No. 1,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 28, 1901; “Rare, Old Paintings of Famous Alabamians,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 27, 1901; “Vets Visit ‘Davis Room,’” November 15, 1901.

commissioned original artwork of Yancey. “At my suggestion,” he told the board in the 1903 report, “Samuel Hoffman, a local artist painted a life size picture of...Yancey.” Donors to the ADAH not surprisingly sent images as well, not only of Yancey but of Confederate figures such as Alpheus Baker, M. J. Bulger, E. C. Bullock, John T. Morgan, William C. Oates, Edmund Pettus, and Robert E. Rodes.<sup>18</sup>

When Owen accepted a portrait of General John B. Gordon, who had gone on to be a governor of Georgia and a United States Senator, he employed mild versions of Lost Cause phraseology that nonetheless were unmistakable in meaning. The gift of Gordon’s portrait occasioned a well-attended public presentation at ADAH prefaced by a biographical snippet from Captain Charles P. Rogers of the 37<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. After Rogers outlined Gordon’s military resume, it was Owen’s turn to speak. He “referred to Gordon as ‘one of the knightliest of that knightly race’ that struggled in the bloody days from 1861 to 1865.” He promised his largely-veteran audience that Gordon’s portrait “would be kept...preserved in the State’s gallery forever, an object lesson of patriotism, of high ideals, of noble endeavor.” In closing, Owen lauded the men of Gordon’s generation. “The greatest asset in Alabama’s wealth,” he told them, was not its “great material resources,” but “you who have made her what she is, in the rehabilitation of fortune in the midst of dire distress in the dark days of reconstructions.” Owen’s unspoken reference to southern whites’ paramilitary overthrow of the

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<sup>18</sup>“Alabama Department of Archives and History, No. 22,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 5, 1902; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1903,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH; *Bulletin No. 1*; “Mr. Owen Sends Thanks,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 26, 1902; “Gallant Soldier,” July 19, 1903.

carpetbagger, scalawag, and African American regimes of 1865-1877 prompted “the utmost enthusiasm of the audience.”<sup>19</sup>

Owen was not necessarily averse to having a few pictures of scalawags and post-bellum federal officials in his archives. Intent on collecting images of all of Alabama’s governors, Owen completed his project with a portrait of native Republican David P. Lewis, whose 1872-1874 term was according to a Huntsville paper (and Walter Fleming’s work) “noted for its extravagance, the increase of taxes and enlargement of public debt.” A donated portrait of General Wager Swayne, Alabama’s 1867-1868 military governor and head of the state’s Freedmen’s Bureau, merited mention in Owen’s 1902 board report. It was alright to receive pictures of Lewis and Swayne, he assured the board. The former had served the Confederacy during the war and the latter at least had proven his bravery in regular combat. Owen did not indicate, however, whether he would hang their pictures prominently or keep them in storage.<sup>20</sup> Black Alabamians and certain carpetbaggers on the other hand were unacceptable subjects for display. Not once did Owen solicit or receive images of New Yorker George E. Spencer, the colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama Cavalry (United States) and Alabama senator from 1868 to 1879. Nor did he ask for drawings, engravings, or paintings of African American office holders from the Reconstruction years.

Lewis and Swayne remained exceptions. Taken in total, the ADAH’s collection of images leaned decisively Confederate. Forty-three of the 109 donated images mentioned in Owen’s reports to the board of trustees were of Alabama’s Confederate statesmen or military

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<sup>19</sup>“Gen. J. B. Gordon’s Picture For Alabama,” *Confederate Veteran* 15 (December 1907): 569; “Painting of Gen. Gordon,” *Montgomery Times*, July 11, 1907.

<sup>20</sup>*Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, April 29, 1903; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1903,” Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and Correspondence, ADAH; *Bulletin No. 1*.

personages. A further seven championed defenders of slavery and states' rights. Owen also received images of Lee's farewell to his troops at Appomattox, the monument to John C. Calhoun in Charleston, common Confederate soldiers, Confederate heroine Emma Sansom, fire eater Preston Brooks, Confederate martyr Tennent Lomax, and Lomax's politician son, one of the authors of the 1901 state constitution. Several pictures of both the 1875 and 1901 constitutional conventions, in which white Alabamians first overturned carpetbag rule and then disfranchised African Americans, represented post-bellum and contemporary politics while obscuring the 1868 pro-Reconstruction convention. No matter which images Owen rotated in and out of storage, their visual message to visitors was clear: the ADAH archival gallery upheld a militant, white supremacist view of Alabama's past that celebrated the Confederacy and the overthrow of Reconstruction (Appendix 4).

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Ex-Confederates' emotional response to the "Davis Room" shows that in addition to flags and pictures, Owen used personal belongings and other items to create a Lost Cause aura in the museum. Thanks to earlier efforts by UDC chapters, the capitol already housed a large number of war relics, but Owen would build a larger collection. Ready to accept any and all material donations, he took special note of Confederate items given to the ADAH. In the department's first bulletin, he pointed out that it now had Yancey's gold-headed walking cane, dueling pistol, and portable writing desk; the swords and leather trunks of officers of the 14<sup>th</sup> Alabama, 33<sup>rd</sup> Alabama, and 45<sup>th</sup> Alabama infantry regiments; and a jerry-rigged cannon from 1865. Someone sent a bugle from Wheeler's cavalry, while another donor sent the pistol of Captain Henry Wirz,

the notorious commandant of the Andersonville Confederate Prison Camp executed in 1865 for war crimes.<sup>21</sup>

And the gifts kept coming in. One notable donation that Owen “regard[ed]...as...of great value” was a bundle of Ku Klux Klan items, including “a [Klan] mask, sword, and belt” from a veteran of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment. Larger items given included “an old cylinder head of a steam engine, forming a part of the Confederate rolling mill equipment, 1863-1865, at the Brierfield iron works,” the remains of a wartime hulk from the Mississippi River, and parts of the *Star of the West*, the captured blockade runner that Lincoln had once employed to try and resupply the Union garrison at Fort Sumter. Owen’s museum collections ultimately grew large enough by 1905 to require temporary use of the House of Representatives chamber for the overflow.<sup>22</sup>

As with his portraits, Owen’s museum collections overwhelmingly celebrated white Alabamians. Even the few exceptions proved the rule, such as the gold medal once presented to “Bob,” a one-armed African American ferryman on the Alabama River named Bob Goodwyn who had saved a white passenger from drowning in 1908. At the presentation ceremony, the mayor and sheriff of Montgomery chose their words carefully. They reminded Goodwyn that “this medal is not only a reward for your individual act, but to assure all the people of your race that they have the good will of the white people when they perform their duties, and show good

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<sup>21</sup>Alabama Relics,” *Alexander City Outlook*, June 30, 1897; *Bulletin No. 1*; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1903”; “Famous Bugle Is Received,” *Montgomery Times*, August 30, 1907; “An Historic Pistol,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 30, 1905.

<sup>22</sup>Undated clipping, n. p., Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, SG016719, AF-TO, ADAH; “Minutes and Annual Report, 1906”; *Crenshaw County News*, November 18, 1909; “Dr. Owen Will Use Hall,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 11, 1915. Although the archives’ museum famously would expand far more dramatically after Thomas Owen’s death under Marie Owen’s direction, it is noteworthy that he originated ADAH’s acquisitions.

will to the dominant race.” Goodwyn had proven his worth by saving one of the “dominant race”; yet he would do well to remember that their “good will, as you know, Bob, is not to be despised.” Goodwyn received his medal with an equally measured speech, returned to obscurity, and later drowned performing another heroic rescue mission. After Goodwyn’s death, Owen took possession of his medal, attaching no special significance to it except that it was an historical artifact.<sup>23</sup>

Despite its breadth and eccentricities, Owen tried to bring some order to ADAH’s collections. He outlined two arrangements of his artifacts. The first, from an undated entry in one of his memorandum books, may have been an early prototype. Under “Relics,” Owen created two headings. The second heading pertained to items “in storage, properly labeled.” He subdivided the first heading, “In display cases,” into eight subheadings that listed artifacts in chronological order by era or by topic. “Aboriginal” artifacts preceded those from the “Revolutionary War” or “Pioneer” times. “Education” came fourth, then “War of Secession,” “Arms and Ordinance,” and “Our Own Times.” “Personal” came last; presumably it included notable items in Owen’s personal collection. Like the majority of historical and heritage museums in the New South, Owen’s archival museum used specific labels and time periods for its items to highlight Anglo-Saxon progress.<sup>24</sup>

Owen’s second arrangement of artifacts, created around 1909, was more martial and overtly Confederate. He planned to place ten cases in the research room. Four were to be dedicated to Civil War items. Case 1 would contain “Flags of Alabama commands,” case 8

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<sup>23</sup>“Minutes and Annual Report, 1908”; “Medal Is Given To Bob,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 31, 1908.

<sup>24</sup>Untitled heading, Memorandum Book No. 1 – “Personal,” History, n. p., SG030088, AF-TO, ADAH; Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Hilyer, “Relics of Reconciliation.”

“Guns, swords, pistols, and canes,” and case 7 various other things from the “War of Secession.” “Biographical materials” for specific historical white Alabamians, among them Jabez L. M. Curry, William Yancey, and Raphael Semmes,” would be in Case 10. At some point he further displayed the Klan items from the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama soldier in “a case to themselves,” where they were “the objects of much curious interest on the part of...sightseers.”<sup>25</sup>

Occasionally Owen took his artifacts out of doors. He wanted to create an exhibition for the Agricultural State Fair, but it took a while for that to happen. A joint exhibit with the Pelham Chapter of the UDC, scheduled for 1902, went belly up for unknown reasons. Owen said he would participate in the 1905 fair, but either he never did or his collection was so unimpressive that the press paid it no attention. The third time was a charm. While covering the 1910 fair, the *Advertiser* focused on the ADAH’s 300-square foot exhibit. According to the article, Owen placed his artifacts in five different groups, one of which was “Confederate History.” Noteworthy items were “flags, manuscripts, and rolls,” images of Alabama’s antebellum congressional delegations, and a depiction of Lee and the February 1861 inauguration of Jefferson Davis in Montgomery.<sup>26</sup>

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State fairs were brief happenings and museum exhibits could be rotated. Monuments were more lasting. Placed amongst the people of Alabama, they annexed common areas---and the community’s collective memory---for the ideals they stood for. Cognizant of this,

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<sup>25</sup>Memo book from 1907/03/02 to 1909/03/02 relating to the work of the ADAH, n. p., SG016717, AF-TO, ADAH; Undated clipping, n. p., Societies and Institutions, Archives, Acquisitions, SG016719, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>26</sup>“Pelham Chapter, Birmingham,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 21, 1902; “Dr. Owen to Help the Fair,” December 21, 1904; “Historical Exhibit Attracts Attention,” October 27, 1910.

proponents of the Lost Cause such as Owen sowed Confederate monuments like seed corn wherever they could. Nor were the monuments that Owen helped erect the short, plain, quiet representations of grief over death and defeat that had sprouted during Reconstruction in cemeteries. Since the triumph of Redemption and Jim Crow, Confederate monuments had become proud statues, shafts, tablets, and plinths, almost always depicting armed Confederates by the turn of the century, and now placed prominently in parks and town squares. The visual language of these latter monuments was deliberately commanding, defiant, and aggressive. Through their statuary, according to many scholars, turn of the century white Southerners informed the world that they had nothing for which to regret or apologize, including the overthrow of Reconstruction and their current white supremacy. In lending time, support, and occasionally money to various monument projects Owen usually represented the USCV rather than the ADAH. Even so, because he was at the same time the main spokesperson of the archives, Owen subtly allied his department with Confederate conquest and control of the public space.<sup>27</sup>

Owen's first involvement with Confederate monuments came in 1904. It involved a memorial to Major John Pelham, the artillerist boy hero of Jacksonville, killed in a skirmish at Kelly's Ford Virginia in 1863 at the age of 24. Working with a chapter of the Children of the Confederacy (an auxiliary of the UDC for minors) Owen hosted an "entertainment" in 1904 to fund a monument to Pelham in Anniston, near Pelham's home town. As there was already a full-sized statue for Pelham in the Jacksonville City Cemetery, the committee selected a plain obelisk

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<sup>27</sup>Blair, *Cities of the Dead*; Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow*; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; H. Domby, *The False Cause*; Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past*; Mills & Simpson, *Monuments to the Lost Cause*; Towns, *Enduring Legacy*. The *Montgomery Advertiser* claimed that Owen's re-election to commander-in-chief of the USCV was due to his archival work, "Montgomery Man Heads Sons of Veterans," June 16, 1905.

with brief biography. Owen emceed the unveiling ceremonies before “an immense gathering of citizens.”<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes Owen’s subsequent part in monument work was archival and behind-the-scenes, as in 1908 when he assembled a list of Calhoun County Confederate servicemen for engraving on a plinth funded by the local UDC. At other times, Owen involved himself in every part of a monument’s design and erection. Shown the mock-up of a Lee statue to be placed in a Montgomery suburb that same year, Owen offered the sculptor his artistic thoughts. “I think the figure altogether slender and light,” he wrote. “The whole frame should be made of greater bulk. The shoulders should be broadened, the chest deepened, and the arms and legs should be made larger. I think further that the beard ought to be a trifle heavier, and that the forehead should be slightly receding.” Owen plainly wanted a more visibly stronger, physically imposing Lee. He also took charge of the procession for the monument’s 1908 dedication. “No one else but Confederate soldiers and Veteran women will participate in these exercises,” he cryptically assured ex-Confederate Oates, “with the exception that the [USCV] and the local military will be in the parade.” Serving as master of ceremonies again, Owen made sure that the veterans, heritage organizations, and the thirteen matrons representing the Confederate states knew and kept to their places in line.<sup>29</sup>

At the unveiling of another monument at Robinson Springs in July 1913, Owen again was the main speaker. Perhaps at no other moment in his career did he so fully enunciate his

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<sup>28</sup>Rochelle Ramga, “John Pelham,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1521>, published May 5, 2008, accessed April 1, 2020; “Children of the Confederacy,” *Union Springs Herald*, October 12, 1904.

<sup>29</sup>“Rosters of Calhoun County Confederates,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 24, 1909; Owen to Massey Wilson, May 5, 1908, Owen to William C. Oates, June 6, 1908, Memorials to John T. Morgan and Robert E. Lee, SG016731, AF-TO, ADAH.

positive views of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause or his hatred of Reconstruction. His scribbled outline began with the assertion that the “Confederacy lives on its monuments,” followed by a rhetorical “What? Why not?” Monuments, Owen thought, served three purposes, “Educational,” “Inspirational,” and “Practical.” “They are milestones,” his outline continued, “Erected by...a community of people” so that “Everything that is heroic shall be kept in perpetual remembrance.” The “erection of monuments” was in each and every case “a protest against oblivion.” What stood in danger of oblivion, and what were Confederate monuments supposed to remind their beholders? “Differences,” about “Abolition,” Owen answered, that were “Irreconcilable.”<sup>30</sup>

At the introduction of slavery as a topic, Owen’s outline shifted to a strident defense of the Confederate nation and a downplaying of the southern racial order as a catalyst for war. “Secession then – Demonstrated what?” Owen asked. Southern states had not left the Union “To tear down a government,” or “to perpetuate slavery.” Nor had they acted “Because the people were misled,” given that “People then [were] little educated in the politics than ever before...” No, secession happened because there had already been “War on the part of the North.” The ensuing conflict revealed the “Unpreparedness of the South” in regards to “Numbers in the struggle” and exposed some fissures in popular conceptions of a “Rich man’s war poor man’s fight.” Nevertheless “Women” and “Young men” had not hesitated to suffer and die for the “The flag,” and in so suffering and dying they had sanctified themselves. Some Northerners might cavil, but “The mature judgments of today should not apply to the deeds and conducts of

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<sup>30</sup>“Dr. Owen Selected as Orator of Day,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 16, 1913; Notes on paper, Historical and Patriotic Societies, SG016729, AF-TO, ADAH.

our fathers.” The outline ended on a defiant note: “Lost Cause! No!”<sup>31</sup> The monument area at Robinson Springs was a closed, Confederate space by right of white southern resistance, according to Owen, while the new statue joined what historian Adam Domby calls the region’s “victory monuments.”<sup>32</sup>

A bulletin pointed outline such as this could not help sounding prickly. In the actual address, as covered by the press, Owen apparently moderated some of his bellicose passions while laying claim to Confederate heritage through a personal icon. “Dr. Owen is very proud of the record of his father,” one paper reported, “and...exhibited [his] bronze cross of honor” representing what Owen regarded as “his good name, his patriotic devotion to duty, his unselfish service to his country, and his willingness to die for her should need be.” In Owen’s opinion his father’s “unselfish service” had not ended in 1865, for “when the true story of the war [is] written, it [will] be found that it...continued for...ten subsequent years.” Fully subscribing to the “long Civil War” view of current-day historians, Owen tellingly told his veteran listeners that their resistance to the “evil forces of Reconstruction” was “equal to the actual struggles of hostilities on the field.” Fortunately the “ideals of patriotism” infused into William Owen and his comrades had made them equal to the task of overthrowing the dastardly carpetbaggers. The old Confederates’ patriotism in turn enjoyed a long pedigree, which Owen traced back to “the heroic annals of the Gracian [sic] peninsula” and the vigorous autonomy of “the small but patriotic German states” of the Early Modern era. The Confederacy had not been an outlier. With its “solidarity of purpose and sentiment,” its “splendid leadership,” and its “great achievement under unexampled difficulty,” the Confederate nation sat in the main

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<sup>31</sup>Notes on paper, Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Domby, *The False Cause*, 19.

channels of history, and like its Greek and Teutonic predecessors it had left an enduring imprint on the land itself. Properly remembered through its statuary, the Lost Cause was won. That, Owen decided, was more than reason enough to rejoice. “I commend most heartily your action in the erection of this monument,” he intoned, “I commend unreservedly.”<sup>33</sup>

The Robinson Springs monument emerged in a southern landscape thick with stone honorariums. A large percentage of Lost Cause monuments dotted towns, public parks, and cityscapes by World War I. Many more clustered at the places where blue and gray had clashed. The appearance of Confederate monuments on battlefields resulted from the spirit behind their federal preservation. Aging veterans in the 1890s had persuaded Congress to purchase, mark, and protect land at Chickamauga and Chattanooga, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Shiloh, and Antietam. Battlefield parks officially served an educational purpose. Administered and cared for by the War Department until the 1930s, they were intended to be laboratories for the professional development of United States Army officers through “staff rides” studying Civil War generals’ plans and actions. Yet no less significant than the hands-on military training they offered---indeed, perhaps more so in the long term---were battlefield parks’ contribution to sectional reconciliation. When white Union and Confederate veterans and their families met on those hallowed fields, for the most part they met as equals, proud of their own service, respectful if not admiring of their enemy’s courage and devotion, and more or less willing to forgive, forget, and move on. Blood spilled defending what were then increasingly characterized as slight differences in American values provided a common cultural currency between opposing veterans. Periodic joint blue-gray reunions at the parks helped foster this ideal of a white “band

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<sup>33</sup>Undated newspaper clipping, n. p., Ibid. For an introduction to the “long Civil War” periodization scheme, see Downs, *After Appomattox*.

of brothers” temporarily and tragically divided but once more arm-in-arm. Organizers rarely permitted wartime issues of slavery and emancipation, or messy contemporary racial affairs, to disturb these North-South “love fests.”<sup>34</sup>

Battlefield partnerships between the government and the veterans in gray provided the latter positions of authority and shares of space. The parks were administered by intra-state commissions structured to represent both sides. Quite often, high ranking ex-Confederates found themselves on the commissions, empowered to shape cultural, educational, and memorial programming to their liking as much as blue-gray cooperation allowed. Annexation of the grounds accompanied infiltration at the top. As soon as they could raise the money, Confederate veterans’ associations fortified the new parks with granite markers to their units, states, and leaders, ostensibly to mark battle positions but indirectly to spread Lost Cause iconography into the federal sphere.<sup>35</sup>

Owen involved himself in that process as early as 1906, at Gettysburg. He first asked if there was a monument to Alabama troops. If there was not, he then sought to rectify such absence. One commissioner at Gettysburg National Military Park (NMP), Confederate veteran Lunsford Lomax, replied to Owen’s inquiry that with the debatable exception of border state Maryland, no southern states were represented in the statuary. To erect a monument to Alabamians, however, required an okay from the War Department. If they approved, the

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<sup>34</sup>Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America’s First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008); Caroline Janney, “‘I Yield to No Man an Iota of My Convictions’: Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park and the Limits of Reconciliation,” *Journal of the Civil Era* 2 (September 2012): 403; Blight, *Race and Reunion*. As with other aspects of Civil War memory, some current scholars probing monuments and orations at battlefield parks have found that reconciliation sentiment was not universal, e.g.s, Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, and “‘I Yield to No Man.’”

<sup>35</sup>Smith, *Golden Age*.

monument would have to be placed where the majority of men from the Yellowhammer State had seen action.<sup>36</sup>

The ADAH director let the matter go for the moment, for at the same time he was busy talking to the commission at Chickamauga-Chattanooga NMP about a marker that had displeased his veteran office assistant, George Brewer. At one park after another, aging Union and Confederate veterans argued about the precise placement of monuments, with both sides trying to champion their farthest advances while denying the full achievements of their former enemies. Brewer for his part objected to the marker's placement of his 46<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry and Pettus' Brigade one mile north of where Brewer remembered they had actually been. To be certain that his mind was not playing tricks on him, Brewer went to spot again and walked around it carefully. There could be no doubt, he told Owen; the topography at the supposed site was not right. For that matter, some of what the marker said was inaccurate. The 46<sup>th</sup> Alabama had left its prior posting on Lookout Mountain later than the rest of the brigade because it had gotten into a nighttime skirmish that was not mentioned in the marker's text. He enlisted Edmund Pettus himself, then serving in the United States Senate, as a witness. Assistant park historian J. P. Smart sympathized with his gripes, but told Owen that it not be an easy matter to amend the marker, especially given the fact that nothing in the *OR* supported Brewer's story. Owen, Smart,

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<sup>36</sup>Owen to John P. Nicholson, June 6, 1906, Lunsford L. Lomax to Owen, July 19, 1906, Chickamauga, Vicksburg and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH. The Alabama Division of the UDC finally erected a state monument at Gettysburg NMP in 1933, Steve A. Hawks, "State of Alabama Monument," Stone Sentinels, accessed April 1, 2020, <https://gettysburg.stonesentinels.com/confederate-monuments/confederate-state-monuments/alabama/>.

and Brewer went back and forth on this for months before Brewer reluctantly admitted that his memories and measurements might well be wrong.<sup>37</sup>

Vicksburg NMP had no Alabama monuments either, Owen learned from park chairman William T. Rigby, nor did the state have any representation in the park commission. Rigby put Owen in contact with park superintendent (and former Confederate general) S. D. Lee, urging him and Lee to tag-team the Alabama legislature during a joint session in early 1907. With judicious lobbying and a little luck, they might win approval and funds for a five-member panel and a statue in one fell swoop. Owen and Lee agreed that Lee would address the lower chamber one day, with AHS members in attendance, and speak to both houses the day following. But Lee suddenly forced Owen to alter the plan. He told Owen that he felt tongue-tied in the presence of scholars. He had not even spoken before the Mississippi Historical Society, although he had known its members for years. Owen hurriedly canceled the first address and coached Lee on addressing the joint session, although it is not clear what he told Lee to say. The timing nonetheless was fortuitous for park appropriations, because a delegation of Union veterans had recently visited the capital during a grand tour of battlefield sites. The *Times* and *Advertiser* united in bringing law-makers' attention to the Vicksburg commission bill. Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio had numerous Yankee monuments and markers at Vicksburg, the press pointed out. Surely it was time for Alabama to erect some granite tribute for its native sons.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>George Brewer to Owen, June 26, July 27, August 8, 1906, Pettus to Brewer, June 30, 1906, Col. J. P. Smart to Owen, July 11, August 7, and September 13, 1906, Owen to Smart, September 15, 1906, Chickamauga, Vicksburg and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH. Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*.

<sup>38</sup>Owen to William T. Rigby, June 9, 1906, Rigby to Owen, July 7 and 13, 1906, Owen to S. D. Lee, January 4, 1907, Lee to Owen, January 7, 1907, Chickamauga, Vicksburg and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-

Alabama's legislators did not stir. Six months went by but the situation did not improve, according to Owen, and he decided it was not worth Lee's time to come and speak again. As he explained, "The very large appropriations [of the past], although in behalf of such worthy objects as schools and old soldiers...have been very severely criticized, and the leaders are quite sensitive over the situation." This fiscal austerity was not unwarranted: Alabama was digging itself deep into debt. Expenditures had been growing steadily in the Progressive epicenter of the Deep South since before the ADAH appeared, and there had been increasing calls in Montgomery for retrenchment.<sup>39</sup>

Yet Owen did attempt to win over the lawmakers again later that summer, and this time got paper promises from them at least. The House proposed, and the Senate approved, a pair of bills penned by Owen that created a state commission at Vicksburg, with seats for eight veterans. They set aside \$25,000 for monuments at the park and another \$10,000 for statues of Davis and John T. Morgan to adorn the capitol lawn. Yet so far as it is known, the commission never sat and the money was never spent. In 1913 Owen told Rigby that the legislature had grown so tight-fisted that it was considering the repeal of the commission bill. Two years later Owen cautioned supporters not to mention Vicksburg in the capitol. "If there were any agitation of the subject just now," Owen claimed, "I feel sure that the legislature would repeal the [commission] provision...There is a strong disposition to close every approach to the State Treasury, and very

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TO, ADAH; "Alabama Soldiers at Vicksburg," *Montgomery Times*, January 22, 1907; "Gen. Lee Will Urge Money For Memorial At Vicksburg," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 22, 1907.

<sup>39</sup>Lee to Owen, June 25, 1907, Owen to Lee, July 6, 1907, Chickamauga, Vicksburg and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH.

properly [sic].” Give it some time, Owen cautioned; “Alabama will have a monument there.” It ended up taking another thirty-six years.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas Gettysburg, Chickamauga-Chattanooga, and Vicksburg had no monuments in the early twentieth century to Alabama troops, Shiloh NMP eventually got one, thanks to the UDC and Owen’s own efforts. The trouble was that it said something technically incorrect. It all started in the archives in 1905, with Owen working up a list of Alabama regiments, battalions, staff officers, and generals who had been present at Shiloh for inscription on the UDC-sponsored monument. He converted the list to an inscription format and sent it to the Alabama Division. Back came a request to remove the staff officers, which Owen did. Owen returned the revised inscription, encouraging the Daughters to consult park historian David W. Reed for final proofreading. Back again came the inscription text with further revisions: an independent cavalry company needed to be added, General Hardee’s name should be scratched out (he had been a Georgian), and, reflecting the confusing enumeration of Civil War military units, the 26<sup>th</sup> Alabama and 31<sup>st</sup> Alabama infantry regiments should actually be the 26<sup>th</sup>-50<sup>th</sup> Alabama and the 49<sup>th</sup> Alabama. Owen made all the changes, satisfied the Daughters, and in spring 1907 traveled with them to the park for the dedication. Following Reed’s suggestion, they placed the Alabama monument where the state’s soldiers had helped surround and capture Benjamin Prentiss’

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<sup>40</sup>“Senate Takes Firm Stand For Honor Of Confederates,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 2, 1907; Owen to Rigby, November 4, 1913, Owen to Captain R. H. Gaines, January 30, 1915, Chickamauga, Vicksburg, and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH; “Alabama Memorial,” Vicksburg NMP, National Park Service, last updated April 14, 2015, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/vick/learn/historyculture/alabama-memorial.htm>.

division at the “Hornet’s Nest” on the first day of the battle. Owen and the *Advertiser* joined in praising the Alabama UDC’s work; they had “removed the stain from the name of the State.”<sup>41</sup>

Then Alabama veteran John Weeden, once of the 49<sup>th</sup> Alabama, stopped by Shiloh NMP some weeks later and came upon the monument. It contained a startling error. Weeden quickly wrote to Owen. “Knowing you to be deeply interested in arriving at the true facts of the past history of our state,” he explained, “and especially in regard to the history of our Civil War, I beg to lay before you the following statement of facts.” For some inexplicable reason, the 31<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment was listed as having fought, although it “was not at the battle...but at the time...was in a camp of instruction at Talladega.” Weeden knew that the inscription was supposed to include his old command, and that the two regiments had often been mixed up in histories of the battle.<sup>42</sup>

Owen was disappointed but not at all surprised. He had inserted the correct regimental number in the proofs, he explained, but it had been changed before the monument was inscribed. Owen knew too well who was to blame for that. As he told Weeden, the UDC had caught the error first and “submitted this criticism, together with certain others, to the War Department, [but] they had decided against my contention” because their records had the 31<sup>st</sup> Alabama present. Stubborn as those military bureaucrats were, they could not be overcome by less than a united opposition. Owen thus encouraged the Alabama Division to apply for a change to the

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<sup>41</sup>Owen to Mrs. W. A. Cayle, August 2, 1905; Owen to Mrs. J. N. Thompson, October 6, 1906 and January 12, 1907, Chickamauga, Vicksburg, and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH; “To the Alabama Division,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 2, 1906; “Alabama’s Noble Part At Shiloh; State Neglects Memory Of Soldiers,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 12, 1907.

<sup>42</sup>John D. Weeden to Owen, May 23, 1907, Chickamauga, Vicksburg, and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH. The Huntsville *Morning Mercury* got wind of the story the same week, “Name Omitted,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 28, 1907.

inscription, contact the park's monuments committee, solicit a testimonial letter from Weeden, and forward the whole bundle to Washington, along with a letter from Owen himself if that would help. The committee followed Owen's instructions to the letter with a petition to the Secretary of War, stating that "While the regiment did bear the number #31 it did not long so continue, and it is known to all survivors and in our State records as #49. It seems to the Committee that mere technical correctness ought not to weigh against these considerations." The War Department stuck to its guns. Owen then ventured that chiseling in the correct unit information on the bottom border of the text box would be simpler than revising the entire inscription. There is no correspondence to indicate if the Daughters tried this approach; if they did, it availed naught. Visitors reading the monument inscription today can still mistakenly believe that the 31<sup>st</sup> Alabama, and not the 49<sup>th</sup> Alabama, fought at Shiloh.<sup>43</sup>

Trifling as the matter might seem to some today, it was acutely important to those people such as Weeden who complained. Personal and collective reputations were at stake. If a Confederate regiment was not properly recognized for what it had done, its veterans and their descendants stood to lose honor---a priceless possession in white southern society---and, potentially, pensions as well. Moreover, quibbling about regimental numbers was part and parcel of their belief system. Pro-Confederate ideologues, then as now, regularly honed in on small points and fine details of military and genealogical provenance. Historical exactitude in dates, figures, place and personal names, family lineages, and social statuses was the only way to refute Yankee lies and prove one's righteousness, in a civic religious sense. Union veterans and their modern supporters do the same. But focusing on those points also helped white southerners

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<sup>43</sup>Owen to Weeden, June 7, 1907, Owen to Mrs. J. N. Thompson, October 7, 1907, Committee to Charles G. Brown, March 18, 1908, Committee to the Secretary of War, March 1908 (no date), Owen to Mrs. L. G. Dawson, May 3, 1910, Chickamauga, Vicksburg, and Shiloh National Military Parks, SG017883, AF-TO, ADAH.

to ignore the (historical) elephant in the room: race and its role in the war. By the very nature of his archival collections and public interactions, Owen made it easier for Lost Cause proponents to spend their time chasing rabbit trails.<sup>44</sup>

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In addition to his work building the ADAH museum, participating in state fairs, dedicating public monuments, and trying to place state markers in battlefield parks, Owen put together public commemorations of historical events. Apart from the regular holidays and remembrance days Owen was required to oversee as USCV commander-in-chief, he planned additional celebrations for notable Confederates.<sup>45</sup> Jefferson Davis was, inescapably, the subject of Owen's largest successful program. In collaboration with all major southern heritage organizations, he marked the centenary of Davis' birth in 1808 with a number of different events. Morning and evening assemblies on the capitol grounds featured speeches, remarks, historically-minded sermons, and appropriate musical selections. In the afternoon seven UDC chapters set up markers "in bronze or marble" at sites associated with the Confederate president's February-May 1861 residence in Montgomery, among them the capitol chambers, the supreme court room, St. John's Episcopal Church, and the first "Confederate White House." At the close of the festivities, ten Montgomery high schools received portraits of Davis.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Domby, *The False Cause*.

<sup>45</sup>"Tribute to Wheeler," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 27, 1906; "Birthday of Lee," December 28, 1906; *Tuscaloosa News*, December 30, 1906.

<sup>46</sup>"Minutes and Annual Report, 1906"; "More Plans For The Davis Celebration," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 14, 1908; "To Observe Solemn Centenary Of Davis," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 1, 1908.

Owen ceded the keynote addresses for the centenary to others, but then gave his own laudatory estimation of Davis at a club meeting of The Thirteen a few months after the celebration:

In first place Mr. Davis will be regarded as a prepared man...  
He will [also] in a sense be regarded as a military genius...An examination of the campaigns in which he participated are said by military critics to reveal many of the qualities of a military genius of the highest order...Not that he did not make mistakes...not that he was without blame in his dealing with several of his principal commanders...but in the larger features of war...he easily outranked many of the great men called to his aid...  
History will regard him, irrespective of the foul abuse and criticism to which he has been subjected, and to which his memory will yet be subjected, as an exalted and true patriot. His career as a statesman at a period of great excitement and strife, show that he was ever ready to stand first for the integrity of the whole country, at the same time without compromise in the essential principles of states rights...

History will I think rightly conclude that of all the public men in the South Davis was preeminently the very best who could have been called to the head of the Confederacy...<sup>47</sup>

Once Davis had been honored, why not do the same for Yancey? He was after all Alabama's own son, a states' rights flambeau without peer. Owen was certain a centennial celebration for Yancey would be a signal success. He put the word out to the press, the politicians, and heritage groups in Montgomery and the surrounding counties. Everyone had a stake in this commemoration, Owen declared. "All Confederate organizations," his notice ran, "including the Ladies Memorial Association, the several camps of the United Confederate Veterans and the Sons..., the several chapters of the...Daughters [and] Children of the Confederacy, the...Junior Memorial Associations, the Yallowhammers [sic], and the Confederate History Club" were to convene in committee on July 1, 1914 at the Business Men's League. All the groups Owen named sent representatives, and at the meeting they heard him describe the planned celebration as a means of "character-building." "There are lawless, patriotic, [or] high-minded communities, as the case may be," Owen argued, "But in one where the lives of celebrated and famous men are commemorated, there is surely a large amount of patriotism and enthusiasm aroused" as a result. Paying tribute to a statesman notorious for breaking up his country was, in this unique formulation, evidence of strong civic virtues.

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<sup>47</sup>"Jefferson Davis and His Place in History," presentation, August 3, 1908, Davis Centenary, SG017884, AF-TO, ADAH.

Owen's audience needed no convincing; they overwhelmingly agreed to hold a Yancey centenary on August 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>48</sup>

As Owen contacted speakers and booked venues, he decided to go up one step farther than the Davis centenary. This commemoration needed a personal connection. Happily Yancey's descendants, unlike Davis', were still living. Owen already had contact information for Yancey's sons Goodloe and Dalton, his nephew Hamilton, his grandson William, and his granddaughter, Mrs. J. E. Russell. He invited them all to use the occasion of the centenary for a family reunion. They could worship at the church Yancey had once attended, visit the decorated hall Owen had rented, and press the flesh with thousands of admirers and well-wishers. And because "there is to be an exhibit of Yancey manuscripts, papers, and relics during the week preceding," fished out of storage in the ADAH, "if...any members of the family have any personal or other relics, etc., which you could lend for the purpose...we will be very glad." The Yancey brood agreed to come and William loaned Owen one of Yancey's cups for the exhibit.<sup>49</sup>

Everything proceeded smoothly for a few weeks. John DuBose was transported to Elysium at the prospect of a major celebration for his hero. It was, he said, "a great public service – a service of true educational value," in which "the people of Alabama 'will see...an inspiration and a revelation.'" Then, almost at the last minute, the centenary fell through. There had been earlier rumblings in the press that it might have to be pushed back to a later date "to

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<sup>48</sup>"Century Anniversary Of William Lowndes Yancey Alabama's Greatest Orator," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 27, 1914; "Birth Of Yancey To Be Celebrated," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 28, 1914; "Yancey's Birthday To Be Celebrated August 10," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 1, 1914; "Address By Dr. Thomas M. Owen Explanatory Of The Purposes Of The Meeting," Anniversaries, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>49</sup>Owen to William E. Yancey, July 15, 1914, Owen to Hamilton Yancey, July 16, 1914, Owen to Goodloe H. Yancey, July 18, 1914, Owen to Dalton H. Yancey, July 18, 1914, Owen to Mrs. J. E. Russell, July 18, 1914, Anniversaries, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH; "Yancey Family To Hold A Reunion," *Wetumpka Weekly Herald*, July 23, 1914. The *Advertiser* printed Owen's letter to Hamilton on July 18<sup>th</sup>.

assure the attendance of certain prominent speakers who have been invited to participate.” Owen had been operating within a narrow window of time with little allowance for delays: five weeks was not quite long enough to get everything ready. His preferred date also clashed with a concurrent busy congressional summer session, forcing Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi and Speaker of the House Champ Clark of Missouri to bow out. Other high-profile invitees such as Governor Emmett O’Neal were on vacation. The one absence that probably scuttled the centenary was that of Petrie. Invited to speak on a personage as dear to his heart as it was to Owen’s or DuBose’s, the Auburn professor silently cursed the scheduling conflicts that would take him away from Montgomery before the appointed date. “It [is] a high honor to be asked to pay a tribute to one of the South’s notable men,” Petrie gushed to Owen. Sadly, he could not come. Perhaps, Petrie suggested, Owen could have someone read his paper aloud.<sup>50</sup>

It was better, Owen determined, to postpone until the fall. He held onto William Yancey’s donated artifact against a rescheduled date. Once postponed, however, the Yancey centenary disappeared from view. The rapid acceleration of an overseas crisis in August 1914 brought on hard times in Alabama. “It is proper to explain,” Owen informed William while the first trench lines were forming on the Western Front, “that because of business depression, caused by the war, we have allowed our plans to remain in abeyance.” He promised that he had “no intention whatever of abandoning the Yancey centenary celebration...I merely spoke of the condition which obtains.”<sup>51</sup> Yet in the end a multitude of other things clamored for Owen’s attention. As the United States was gradually drawn into the European conflict, he did abandon

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<sup>50</sup>“The Yancey Celebration A Great Inspiration, Says Colonel Dubose,” *Montgomery Times*, July 18, 1914; “The Yancey Celebration Desired At A Later Date,” *Montgomery Times*, July 24, 1914; “Yancey Celebration May Be Postponed,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 25, 1914; “Yancey Celebration Postponed Until Fall,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 26, 1914; Petrie to Owen, July 20, 1914, Anniversaries, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>51</sup>“Anniversary Of Yancey Passes,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 11, 1914; Owen to William Yancey, August 6, September 17 and 29, 1914, Anniversaries, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

it. Davis, the moderate, had trumped Yancey the fire-eater in posthumous commemorations, just as he had trumped him in life. DuBose must have pouted over that perceived injustice.

Indeed that year the Confederate president received more than a centenary from Owen and the people of Montgomery; he got a starring role in film. Motion picture technology was yet a novelty in 1914 when the Business Men's League pitched the idea of a "photoplay" set in their fair city. It was meant to appeal to northern business interests and convince them to relocate to Alabama, or at least establish branch offices there. Contemporary and historical scenes would blend in the film, creating an image of Montgomery as at once a place to work and a play and a site rooted in the past. The League wanted the city's name in the title until someone pointed out that it did not roll off the tongue. Socialite Lenora Pepperman, credited by the *Advertiser* with having "written a number of scenarios for moving pictures, some of them having recently been produced in local picture play houses," came up with a better title. She dubbed the film project *Present and Past in the Cradle of Dixie*. The League hired Owen as a historical consultant---and probably as an informal casting director and location manager too.<sup>52</sup>

"Prominent Montgomerians....the cream of Montgomery society," served in the main roles and stood as extras. Many other cast members were chosen for their wartime ancestry. Principal photography of the historical scenes (or "memory pictures," the press called them) of Davis' inauguration took place downtown on February 24 under Owen's guidance. An unnamed director cut the 3,000 feet of film down to ten minutes and twenty-two seconds. After a board of

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<sup>52</sup> "To Show Picture Here March 16-19," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 26, 1914; Tanya L. Zanisch, "'Present and Past in the Cradle of Dixie,'" *Alabama Heritage* 27 (Winter 1993): 25-29.

censors approved it, the film premiered at Montgomery's Grand Theater on March 25, 1914, with 20 cents admission for adults and 10 for children, and ran for four days.<sup>53</sup>

Using a familiar trope of romance between a Southern woman and Northern man, *Present and Past* centers on an Alabama girl, Elinore Harrison, and a Bostonian, Bertram C. Lawton, whom she has met up north at college. Harrison invites Lawton and three of his friends to meet her friends in Montgomery for their summer vacation. Lawton and company arrive on February 18, 1911, during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Davis' inauguration. The girls want to show off their city to the boys, so the party piles into cars and they drive to the capitol square. When they arrive, there is a cheering throng around the capitol. Governor O'Neal, introduced on film by Owen, is painting "thrilling word pictures of the stirring days of the early sixties." Abruptly the scene shifts to a flashback: antebellum statesmen including Yancey are in Governor Andrew Moore's office debating the wisdom of taking Alabama out of the Union. Yancey delivers a gesticulating, table-pounding harangue that seals the deal. Alabama secedes and Davis arrives for his inauguration, flanked by militia in decidedly non-Confederate puttees and Stetsons. The president gets fourteen seconds of screen time standing and waving to the crowd against Yancey's four. Another anachronistic artillery piece fires to celebrate the meeting of "the man and the hour." Varina Davis, her children, and the family servants arrive at the "Confederate White House"; Davis assembles his cabinet; and the first Confederate Congress adopts a national flag. The Confederacy has come to life with a bright future before it.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Zanisch, "'Present and Past,'" 27; "Montgomery Movie Enthusiastically Received By Ultra-Critical Censor Board Saturday," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 22, 1914.

<sup>54</sup>*Present and Past in the Cradle of Dixie*, 2:20; Script for "Present and Past in Dixie," SG016718, AF-TO, ADAH.

The film cuts back to 1911. The young people are dancing at “Morning View,” the stately manor of Elinore’s grandfather and guardian, Colonel Harrison. The semi-centennial has had a powerful effect on Lawton. “Standing there...listening to the vivid painting of the days that were...in the words of soothing, impassioned eloquence,” he has “experienced all those sensations in miniature that sent God’s greatest race to the altar of their faith.” He is intoxicated with both love and southern heritage as he realizes “that half a century [has] passed in review...and the sweetheart of his youth still [stands] beside him.” He must have Elinore’s hand, for she is “a beautiful link of the chivalrous past and the dreaming present.” He takes Elinore to a “cozy trysting place” and proposes to her. She accepts, but her father, portrayed by 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry veteran Mitchell B. Houghton, will not accept a “damn Yankee” as his son-in-law and orders him off the property. Lawton leaves dejected but not defeated, planning to sneak back after dark and elope with Elinore. There is no need for that, however, because that evening a fire starts in Morning View, trapping Harrison, Elinore, and her friends. Conveniently nearby, Lawton darts into the burning house before fire fighters arrive and rescues Elinore. Lawton has proven himself to the old Confederate; he is, as Harrison realizes, “a man who has risen to the occasion when danger threatened as well as a man of fashion who eclipsed all others on the...ball room.” Harrison gives his blessing to the young lovers.<sup>55</sup>

This already clichéd story of northern man winning southern belle gives an antiseptic take on secession, one without a war waiting in the wings. Although the fighting had not officially begun in February 1861, one might expect a foreshadowing of what was to come. Yet

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<sup>55</sup>*Present and Past in the Cradle of Dixie*, 7:35, 8:10; “Montgomery Movie Enthusiastically Received by Ultra-Critical Censor Board Saturday,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 22, 1914; Zanisch, “*Present and Past*”; “Mitchell Bennett Houghton,” Find a Grave, February 2, 2011, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/65121276/mitchell-bennett-houghton>.

there is not even one moment's glimpse of battles, diseases, deaths, shortages, or the complete mobilization of southern society. Neither is there any visible enemy in the historical scenes; *Present and Past* after all was a project aimed at attracting Northerners to Montgomery. The Business Men's League veered away from ultra-southern histrionics fearing these would do more harm than good. Budget shortfalls meanwhile probably explain the absence of costumed, early-war volunteers, and the censors would likely have axed any depictions of wartime violence. Additionally, the director opted not to film several USCV and UDC camps, an exclusion that might have been about more than keeping the script short and simple.<sup>56</sup>

Owen's exact role in these exclusions and excisions cannot be ascertained, but in other regards *Present and Past* shows a polite, genteel Lost Cause ethos well suited to the tastes of its historical consultant. The five minutes of flashback feature Confederate politicians declaiming and the white southern middle- and upper-classes mutely supporting them. Secession and state-building are accomplished without undue resistance. Plain farmers and "poor white trash" remain off-screen where they cannot mar the beauty of the better sort. Roles for three African Americans in an early draft are reduced to one "Mammy" genuflecting and taking care of one of the Davis children. The contemporary scenes are segregated racially and socially as well. Twentieth century Montgomery is as rich and white as a bridal cake. In fact Elinore and her friends are wealthier and more polished than their northern beaux. As for the Yankee hero, Lawton is a charming but not uncomplicated figure. Are we supposed to cheer his unfulfilled intention to steal Elinore away, or deplore it? Is it romantic or creepy that he loiters outside her home at night? Would an honorable southern man act so? Lawton does win over ex-Confederate Harrison through his manly behavior and stylishness; but crucially the Old South

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<sup>56</sup>Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*; Script for "Present and Past in Dixie," SG016718, AF-TO, ADAH.

has already won over the Bostonian's heart and mind through Elinore. Interestingly, the original script has Lawton rescue Harrison first, thus symbolically preserving white patriarchy and Confederate superiority. The northern youth's conquest of love nonetheless remains a victory for white reconciliation in which southern cultural strands predominate.<sup>57</sup>

Alabamians credited Owen with making that victory possible. League president Duncan May asserted "it was fortunate...that we enlisted the service and interest of...Thomas M. Owen...Through [him] we were able to re-enact historic scenes that will be of value to future generations." Alabama's and Auburn's presidents quickly arranged for students to see the film so that they might thereby learn "important events in Confederate history." To them the value of the League's photoplay was not that it had attracted investors (it probably did not), but that it presented a "true"---and aesthetic---past.<sup>58</sup>

*Present and Past* in the end was one more notch in Owen's belt. It proved that he could inject the Lost Cause message into any medium outside the archive, whether exhibit, monument address, public festival, or celluloid reel. That film also demonstrated his ability to leaven the mixture of that doctrine, so to speak, depending on the prospective audience or venue. Owen could play a coy Confederate in the theatrical world, a professional Confederate with park officials, historical societies, and artifact collectors, and an unabashed Confederate at commemorations and dedication ceremonies. But who was he in reality? It is time for us to look at the inner man and his beliefs.

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<sup>57</sup> Script for "Present and Past in Dixie," SG016718, AF-TO, ADAH; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford University Press, 1982); Stephen William Berry III, *All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup>"Students Invited To See Pictures," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 24, 1914.

## 11. The Director's Views: Owen and the Lost Cause

Thus far we have examined how Thomas Owen as director of the ADAH employed the different resources, activities, and responsibilities of his department in service to a pro-Confederate version of Alabama's history. This work has contended that Owen believed himself partly compelled to do this because the archives' users, scholarly and non-professional researchers, and the general population wanted it so. Government institutions like state archives are meant to cater to the public, and in the early twentieth-century Deep South the politically and socially dominant part of that public consisted of whites inclined to take the pro-Confederate view in any case.

It does not follow automatically, however, that Owen was a public servant held captive by a way of thinking with which he disagreed. Quite the contrary, Owen thought the same way himself. Although his press releases and official correspondence tended to conceal it, Owen's belief in the Lost Cause was as strong as his patrons'. When we turn to Owen's private letters we see clearly that on the major doctrinal points of the Lost Cause, Owen articulated the typical white southern position of his time.

First was slavery, which Owen brought up while writing to W. W. McConnice, a former Alabama enslaver reluctant to share his antebellum reminiscences. The director would not accept McConnice's reticence to speak or write about his part in that past, for "the Historian of the future must depend upon the testimony of those, who like yourself, are acquainted with conditions." Silence from eyewitnesses could lead people to think that the abolitionists' horror stories might be true. And after all, McConnice had no reason for self-reproach. Everyone

knew, Owen wrote, that “the Southern slaveholder did indeed make a substantial contribution to the elevation of a large section of the human race.” Admittedly “slavery as an institution was doomed from the beginning,” but the free labor system that replaced it was not any better; actually, Owen thought it was worse. He maintained that “If the slave in freedom had been held to the ideals of the best of the slave holders in their management and treatment of them, the race would have been far better off.”<sup>1</sup> The few Simon Legrees of the Old South weighed little in the scales against the majority of benevolent owners.

Owen also never doubted the legitimacy of the Confederate cause. “Fifty years ago,” he wrote in calling for USCV participation in the war’s centennial, “the states of the South adopted Ordinances of Secession, severing, as they had under the Federal Constitution a right to do so, all the political connections which bound them to the United States.” The Confederacy had been “a new Republic,” and the spirit of 1861 was as sacred as the spirit of 1776. Having fashioned a sacred Southern Cross to represent them, “the Sons of the South carried [that banner] to victory, or in defeat baptized it with their blood.” Defeat and destruction of the Confederate nation-state created painful memories that nonetheless “may never be forgotten.” Through the upcoming centennial commemorations, the Sons would show that the Confederate era taught “lessons of incalculable value” including “State-craft, economics, the art of war, and...the quality of superb leadership both in peace and war.”<sup>2</sup> The glories of a futile white southern resistance redirected attention from questions about whether that resistance, if conducted more capably, might have succeeded.

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<sup>1</sup>Owen to W. W. McConnice, October 5, 1916, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>2</sup>Circular letter, n. d., Anniversaries, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

Owen did occasionally deviate from Lost Cause norms. He had his own preferred name for the fight between the Union and the Confederacy, for example. Owen largely rejected the name that most people according to historian Gaines Foster used north and south---“The Civil War”---as well as the more recently constructed “The War Between The States,” a term borrowed from Alexander Stephens but developed, endorsed, and proselytized by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. To be sure, both of those terms sometimes slipped into Owen’s correspondence. In contrast, he never used the federal government’s official name, “The Rebellion.” Likewise, “The Confederate War,” “The Southern War,” “The War for Southern Independence,” and “The Second American Revolution” did not please Owen either. Each of these names, he believed, fell short of being accurate. The right title for the conflict, Owen decided, should pertain to the political process that had sparked it. “After a careful consideration of the several names in use,” Owen wrote to a friend in 1908, “I have determined upon the expression ‘War of Secession’ as an accurate and appropriate title...It certainly has the merit of brevity.” Owen did worry, however, whether the name “can in any way be constituted as offensive to Confederate survivors.”<sup>3</sup>

His views of Reconstruction likewise only deviated slightly from Lost cause norms. Owen fully accepted the Dunning School interpretation of Reconstruction as a Dark Age for southern whites. Publicly Owen neither praised the Klan nor mentioned them in his many newspaper interviews or columns, but privately he generally approved of what they had done. To assist a man researching the Klan, Owen once composed a circular addressed to anyone who knew surviving members. Owen reassured his correspondents that the interviewer was not

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<sup>3</sup>Owen to Thomas G. Jones, April 29, 1908, Box 7, Thomas M. Owen United Sons of Confederate Veterans Records, 1896-1930, LRP284, ADAH; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, and “What’s Not in a Name.”

looking to trap them; “his work is a serious and earnest effort to gather all of the facts and details concerning this remarkable organization.” There was “no other purpose” to the research than “to honor the brave and heroic men, who, through the Ku Klux Klan of which they were members, contributed their part to the preservation of civilization in the South.”<sup>4</sup> This was a favorable Dunningite view, if not as gushing as Walter Fleming’s scholarship.

Yet as an archivist he also wanted records from pro-Reconstruction forces maintained in perpetuity. He told a former Radical Republican that “the principal figures on both sides in the reconstruction struggle in this state should...I think...be preserved for the sake of the future.” His own views were “wholly catholic” when it came to saving old papers, regardless of which historical group they stood for. “While I belong altogether to the dominant and traditional majority in Alabama,” Owen noted, “I am nevertheless anxious that everything whatever, however remotely bearing upon our history should be preserved.”<sup>5</sup> Letters and reminiscences about carpetbaggers and scalawags should be no exception.

Owen drew no pushback for this stance. To the contrary, pro-Confederate organizations and individuals routinely looked to Owen as a public advocate. A few examples will suffice. Camp William J. Hardee of the UCV in Birmingham put forth a “Vigorous Protest” in the spring of 1901 against the use of the word “rebel” to describe Confederate soldiers. “Rebel,” the camp complained, “did great injustice” to the Cause “and should be eliminated from history as much as possible.” The camp resolved “to invoke the assistance of...Owen, the director of Alabama’s

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<sup>4</sup>Owen to “To Whom It May Concern,” July 23, 1912, Inquiries, General, SG016728, AF-TO, ADAH

<sup>5</sup>Owen to James Shaw, November 19, 1913 and October 30, 1915, Republicanism in Alabama, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

Historical Department, in having all histories in this state written as to leave out the obnoxious word.”<sup>6</sup>

Alabama’s official post-Reconstruction seal hurt unreconstructed feelings as well. “W. S. W” (probably a pseudonym for the former state legislator, University of Alabama classicist, and in May 1901 incoming university president William S. Wyman) demanded that the government clean it up by altering its design. As the constitutional convention gathered in Montgomery, the author took aim at the current state seal. The part that offended “W. S. W.” was the bald eagle in the center. It was federal fauna, not southern, he maintained, and it had no business being on Alabama’s seal. The eagle, he added with a sneer, was “A bird of prey, ever since the days of the patient Job,” and it “fitly represents the swarm of fowl birds who came from the four ends of the United States, and from Austria and Africa, to loot and devour the little substance that the impoverished people had remaining to them as a result of the downfall of the Southern Confederacy.” In short, “it is deeply symbolical of the era of carpetbaggery – and of nothing else.” “W. S. W.” suggested that the legislature empanel a committee to create a new design and the two people he considered best qualified to chair that committee were John W. DuBose and Owen.<sup>7</sup>

William C. Oates, war hero and former Alabama governor, also held up the director as an exemplar. Early in the new century, Oates fought unsuccessfully at Gettysburg, this time in an effort to erect a monument to his brother and his men far up on Little Round Top. Northern opposition, led by his opponent there in 1863, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, disputed Oates’

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<sup>6</sup>“Vigorous Protest,” *Blount County News Dispatch*, May 9, 1901.

<sup>7</sup>“The Great Seal,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 13, 1901.

claims that his Alabamians had advanced as far as Oates claimed. The experience clearly left Oates embittered.<sup>8</sup> In 1904, at the height of the monument brouhaha, he scoffed in print at the idea that the Civil War already had received exhaustive and definitive historical attention. Inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and falsities kept cropping up in academic and popular studies and even in the news, Oates claimed. White Southerners had to fight the good fight where history was concerned. They ought to also expand their conception of important topics from that era. Battle studies, biographies, and other “drum and trumpet” works were fine, but Oates had come to believe that the war’s origins and Confederate motivations mattered as much. “The cause of secession and war should be studied as well as the recitation of deeds of gallantry, devotion to country, [and] splendid and deficient generalship,” Oates admonished his fellow Southerners. “That work is in its infancy.” Oates happily noted that “Tom Owen and his sons of veterans are on the right line....Young men” like Owen would report the Cause rightly to the next generation because “[they] read and inform themselves.”<sup>9</sup>

In each of these cases, the aggrieved were certain that whatever Owen might publicly say about historical objectivity, personally he was on their side. Indeed, the Camp Hardee veterans and “W. S. W.” expected Owen to intervene decisively in the spheres of government and publication. To their way of thinking, Owen was a censor holding the power to constrain or silence any challenge to Confederate orthodoxy.

To other white Southerners, meanwhile, Owen was someone worth enlisting when the goal was to refine and further develop certain parts of that very orthodoxy. In the new century,

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<sup>8</sup>Glenn LaFantasie, “Memories of Little Round Top,” Gettysburg Seminar Papers, National Park Service, last updated July 12, 2019, accessed April 15, 2020, [http://npshistory.com/series/symposia/gettysburg\\_seminars/4/essay5.htm](http://npshistory.com/series/symposia/gettysburg_seminars/4/essay5.htm).

<sup>9</sup>“Tribute to Gen. Stephen D. Lee,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 16, 1904.

no group was more involved in shaping that authorized view of the wartime era than the United Daughters of the Confederacy. A good example is his assisting UDC members in a campaign to change the words to the unofficial Confederate anthem “Dixie.” Annie Whitfield Dowdell, president of the Daughters’ Alabama Division, opened the “Dixie” campaign in the spring of 1903. As she told the *Confederate Veteran*, there was nothing wrong with the chorus, easily the most memorable part of the song. The trouble was the verses: no two people could agree on the same words. Dowdell offered anecdotal proof for this claim by sharing the experiences of a sister Daughter, Amelia Brown Camper. While vacationing at Chautauqua, New York, Camper had requested---in vain---a rendition of “Dixie” from either the children’s choir or the resort band. Neither could recall how to sing or play most of it. Further research had disclosed the existence of multiple “Dixies” before, during, and since the war, with verses ranging in tone from humorous to Arcadian to romantic and to blood-curdling. Contrary to popular belief, Camper discovered there was no single, standard version of the song. Worse still, the original verses, attributed to Ohio tunesmith Daniel Emmett, bore the imprint of the minstrel circuit and its crude stereotypes of African American speech patterns. Proper white southern folk deserved something better, Dowdell fumed. “Let us keep this chorus,” Dowdell implored, “but preserve [the rest of “Dixie”] in a language expressive of cultured people.” She fully expected Confederate heritage organizations to lead the way.<sup>10</sup>

Dowdell insisted that it was not her intention to impose any one version on the UCV, USCV, or UDC. Rather, she sought to collect as many alternate “Dixies” as possible, present

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<sup>10</sup>“Shall the Words of Dixie Be Changed?,” *Confederate Veteran* 12 (May 1904): 215-216; “Words for Dixie,” n. d., Civil War and Dixie, SG017882 , AF-TO, ADAH; Foster, *Ghosts*. For a literary analysis of “Dixie’s” lyrical malleability, see Coleman Hutchison, “Whistling ‘Dixie’ for the Union (Nation, Anthem, Revision),” *American Literary History* 19 (Autumn, 2007): 603-628.

these to the organizations, and let each ratify whatever version they wanted. Dowdell also expected, and invited, new renditions from the general public.<sup>11</sup> So long as the Veterans, the Sons, and the Daughters chose some version other than Emmett's, they would be doing a favor to the South. That any of the organizations might stick with the faux-Gullah "obs" "des," "dars," and "whars" of the old version was as unthinkable for Dowdell as it was for many newspaper editors. "Could our [wartime] girls when parting with brothers, lovers and fathers, while tears were in their eyes and sorrow in their hearts [have sung] that slang, so unlike the pure English of the cultured south[?]" asked the *Montgomery Journal*.<sup>12</sup>

Even with the local option, the campaign was bound to be a hard sell from the start. For every Southerner who supported the change, there were many more who firmly opposed any alterations to their beloved "Dixie," however well-intentioned. Others were dead set against standardizing the song at all, as that smacked of Yankee-style centralization. Let Southerners be true to their "rebel" roots by singing along to whatever words pleased them, they argued.<sup>13</sup>

All the parties in the dispute soon appealed to Owen, not for archival information on the origins of "Dixie" but for the sake of publicity. Early on, Owen informed Dowdell and Camper that they had his support. The Daughters were glad to have it. The press, they complained, was generally hostile to them, and everyone seemed to think that they wanted to force an unwanted "Dixie" on the South at large. Dowdell and Camper expressed further uncertainty about the Veterans' position. UCV Commander-in-Chief John B. Gordon had declared for them, but the

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<sup>11</sup>For a time, the press printed these original renditions, e.g., "New Words for 'Dixie,'" *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 5, 1904.

<sup>12</sup>"Plea for 'Dixie,'" *Montgomery Journal*, June 20, 1903.

<sup>13</sup>E.g., Mrs. W. G. McCausland to Owen, n. d., William H. Hartwell to Owen, January 12, 1904, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH.

commander of the Alabama Division, George P. Harrison, was hesitant. The organization's rank-and-file was variously rumored to be leaning one way or the other. Dowdell thus asked Owen to take a stand for them at the next USCV meeting, and preferably pen a newspaper article to that effect. Camper also asked Owen whether they should publish Gordon's approving letter. Both prodded Owen to canvass the Veterans at the next reunion.<sup>14</sup>

Owen agreed, and encouraged Dowdell and Camper to publish the Gordon letter.<sup>15</sup> To build internal support, Owen also proposed a joint committee with one representative each from the Daughters, and the Sons, and the Confederate Memorial Association. He then drafted a conservatively-worded circular on the committee's behalf which explained that it had formed because "the old words in the version of the song...are entirely inadequate compared with the martial air, and the sentiment inspired by the music."<sup>16</sup> His overriding recommendation, however, was due caution. Allow the movement time, he urged Dowdell and Camper, to build up organically in each camp and chapter before pressuring the national leadership. Given the subject, haste would be ruinous:

...[Y]ou may expect many persons as well as chapters and camps to oppose the change, until public opinion has been more fully matured. It is not unnatural that a protest should spontaneously arise at the suggestion of the change, particularly since an explanation for the necessity of the change is not known. I think the joint committee, irrespective of how the individual members

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<sup>14</sup>Mrs. A. L. Dowdell to Owen, May 2 and October 17, 1903, Mrs. W. M. Camper to Owen, October 19, 1903, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>15</sup>It appeared in the *Florence Times* under the byline "Glorious Dixie," October 30, 1903.

<sup>16</sup>Circular, n. d., Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH.

may feel...should give as wide dissemination as possible to all information on the subject. After this is done I think the various patriotic organizations, having a right to speak on the subject, should be asked to give formal expression to their feelings. I do not think in the present State of the public mind that it would be advisable to undertake to secure an endorsement of the Veterans...A delay will be far better than a repudiation...<sup>17</sup>

Dowdell responded by asking Owen to revise the circular so that it would be clear “that no one version is being especially advocated at present by the committee, or by any one of its members.” She agreed to wait to bring the Veterans on board “yet I would be very happy now to have them endorse it.” Camper, however, was not inclined to wait. Enlisting her veteran husband’s help, she convinced the UCV leadership to bring up “Dixie” at a semi-annual meeting in Nashville. A “violent discussion” followed, but happily “the motion carried and a Committee was appointed....The question is now before the U.C.V.,” Camper reported to Dowdell, “and the work is ours to educate or convert them to our way of thinking during the coming year.”<sup>18</sup>

Disappointed to hear that the committee’s careful campaign had gone off half-cocked thanks to Camper, Dowdell was ready to throw in the towel. “Well, I fear Dixie with our view upon the subject has had a collapse,” she lamented to Owen. “To me the Dixie circulars were useless – What do you think?” Yet perhaps “it is not too late [with] a different wording[?] Please advise me.” Her archival partner by contrast saw reason to be hopeful. “Now that the

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<sup>17</sup>Owen to Camper, October 23, 1903, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>18</sup>Dowdell to Owen, June 12, 1904, Camper to Dowdell, June 17, 1904, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH. The *Montgomery Advertiser* dismissed the appointment of the committee as “a [mere] matter of courtesy to the Daughters,” for “the veterans are opposed to any change,” “No Change In ‘Dixie’ Words,” June 17, 1904.

Veterans have agreed to the appointment of a committee to cooperate with the other committees,” Owen responded, “the circular ought to be revised so as to contain the names of the Veteran committee.” He began doing so, professing himself “glad now that my advice was not taken...I think it quite fortunate for us that the circular was not issued before the reunion.”<sup>19</sup>

The joint committee, now including a UCV delegate, contended that Emmett’s original verses were “low in tone...wanting in dignity, in nobility of sentiment, [and] in loftiness of spirit,” and altogether “are not commensurate with the martial air which stirred to combat the mighty hosts who followed the stars and bars.” More to the point, “They arouse but little on the part of the Veterans themselves.” In any case, few still knew the original lyrics, and the cacophony of pro-Confederates all singing different stanzas at meetings grated on the nerves. The delegates of the Daughters, Sons, and Veterans thus had agreed on the necessity to select “rhythmic words of patriotic fervor suited to the strains.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet the committee in the end took no further action, and the campaign to change “Dixie” ended not with a bang but with a whimper. Some state and local camps in the Confederate organizations came on board, but at the national level the Daughters, Sons, and Veterans opted to preserve the status quo. Waffling leadership probably did not help; Harrison switched to support, then studied neutrality. Even Owen acted as if he was more comfortable being a

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<sup>19</sup>Dowdell to Owen, June 20, 1904, Owen to Dowdell, June 20, 1904, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>20</sup>*Joint Committee Appointed to Consider and Report on a Selection of New Words for “Dixie”* (N. p: 1904).

strategist and scribe for Dowdell and Camper than a determined spokesman. After the summer of 1904, there was little mention of the need for a new “Dixie.”<sup>21</sup>

With limited information about the actual course of the campaign, it is impossible to say what strategy, if any, would have been best for Dowdell and Camper. The most likely endgame of any possible scenario was that “Dixie” would continue to be a catchy tune with a jaunty chorus and varying verses. The main point is that Owen did not hesitate to throw his weight behind the Daughters. And Camper appreciated Owen’s sticking his neck out, writing him, “Thank you for heartily espousing the cause of ‘Adopting patriotic words for Dixie.’”<sup>22</sup>

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It was no accident that Dowdell, Camper, and other Lost Cause proponents saw Owen as one of their own, for in most respects he was fully in accord with them. With regard to textbooks, a major concern of the UDC, Owen publicly supported communal review and censorship under the direction of pro-Confederate organizations. Indeed he specifically favored chapters of the UDC and UCV directly working with the ADAH to “pass upon all histories now taught in our schools and colleges”<sup>23</sup>. Owen also made textbook review a priority for the USCV. Barely a month into his term as commander-in-chief, Owen mailed a circular to all camps’ historical committee members suggesting that reviews took equal precedence with regular research and original writing. The Sons not only had to “secure the abrogation of many abuses

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<sup>21</sup>“Meeting Of U.D.C.,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 10, 1906, “U.D.C. Convention,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 11, 1906, “Report From Sophie Bibb Chapter, June 4,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 1, 1906; Camper to Owen, July 9, 1904, Dowdell to Owen, August 16 and 22, 1904, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH; John A. Simpson, “Shall We Change The Words Of ‘Dixie?’” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 45 (1981): 19-40.

<sup>22</sup>Camper to Owen, July 9, 1904, Civil War and Dixie, SG017882, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>23</sup> *Eutaw Whig and Observer*, November 7, 1901.

in the school histories,” but also “get together many facts that ought to become part of the new ones to be issued.” To do this, they would have to read and then report on what they had read. In the camps’ next annual reports, Owen expected annotated bibliographies of general studies on the war and Reconstruction, as well as lists of books in use “with a detailed review of their treatment of the war period.” Additionally, there should be notations of where the war period was part of the regular curriculum in southern colleges and universities, and how much time professors spent teaching it.<sup>24</sup>

Owen did hope that southern censorship would be judicious. He cautioned Alabamians that if they were overly zealous in proscribing books that did not toe the line in every particular, they risked becoming as intolerant as their adversaries. Addressing a Confederate Memorial Day service in the spring of 1904, however, Owen left it up to Southerners to find the right balance. Obviously there was no place for “vicious and prejudiced literature” from Northern writers and publishers, “whether taking the form of general historical works...school histories, or historical fiction.” That same stricture applied to white southern writers. ““We do not want prejudiced books,”” Owen declared, and so ““we must be careful that in our own care for this history, we are not the victims of the prejudices we deplore.””<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, Owen was hardly ever clear about what he considered prejudicial literature. The few specific admonitions he made can be found in his review of Joel DuBose’s Alabama textbook, as recounted in chapter 6, where he took issue with phrases such as “ex-slaves” or “ex-Confederates.” Owen may well have been most concerned about context and

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<sup>24</sup> “To Work For New History Interest,” *Montgomery Times*, November 29, 1905; Bailey, “Textbooks of the ‘Lost Cause.’”

<sup>25</sup> “Owen at Opelika,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 27, 1904.

frequency of specific anti-southern claims or phrases. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was one piece of writing definitely on Owen's proscription list. In a 1918 letter he wrote to Montgomery theater owner H. C. Farley, Owen thanked Farley for pulling from regular screening a film version of the Harriet Beecher Stowe anti-slavery melodrama. As he wrote to Farley, "Your action indicates, not only an appreciation of the true history of the south and southern institutions, but...also evidence that you are unwilling to allow anything to be done through your theatre which might tend to arouse sectional feeling." Owen admitted that memories of the war years had receded into the past, leaving many "thoughtful observers...sure that the bitterness aroused by the old controversies has practically disappeared." Still, "they at the same time are satisfied that everything should be avoided which might again stir the emotions."<sup>26</sup> Better, as Owen thought and as Farley had decided, not to risk showing films like that at all.

As an antidote to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, many white Southerners of Owen's time favored the writings of Thomas Dixon, Jr. Dixon's novels, *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and especially *The Clansmen* (1905), were the *ne plus ultra* of Lost Cause, Confederate, and white supremacist sentiment. Essentially transferring the Dunning School's work into fiction, Dixon peopled his antebellum and Reconstruction settings with pure white southern women, gallant white southern men, licentious and depraved black males, and righteous and avenging Klansmen. Dixon's racist portrayal of freedmen angered African Americans and spurred protests and pickets from the

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<sup>26</sup>Owen to Mr. H. C. Farley, July 29, 1918, Correspondence, SG016702, AF-TO, ADAH.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), more so when *The Clansmen* became the basis for the film *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915.<sup>27</sup>

More surprisingly, some white town councils apparently shared the NAACP's concern that Dixon's work was recklessly provocative of racial strife. Shortly after *The Clansmen* appeared, either sales of the book or productions of a play based on the book were prohibited in parts of Alabama and Georgia. Owen and Walter Fleming discussed the matter while promoting Fleming's documentary history of Reconstruction. "I see you Ala. people are giving T. Dixon & the Clansman a black eye," Fleming wrote playfully. "I don't swallow Tom myself, but I don't think that those Ala. & Ga. Town councils show much backbone in this matter." The Dunning Scholar favored what he saw as free speech; there were other ways to keep the peace. "[More] police is what [those towns] need," Fleming argued, "not suppression of the Clansman."<sup>28</sup>

Owen completely agreed. "I do not approve of the stirring up of race strife and hatred," he answered Fleming, "and in many ways have no patience with Dixon." But personal preference aside, Owen maintained that Dixon essentially told the truth about Reconstruction. He wrote, "I for one do not favor the suppression of the Clansman. I believe in letting the truth have the light, and in exploiting the events of the past as they transpired." Alabama's archivist could have faith in the "truth" in large part because as a white southern male in the Jim Crow era,

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<sup>27</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*. In one Kentucky community in the Gilded Age, the works of Stowe and Dixon became totems in a larger struggle over both political and social power and the respective white and non-white shares of memory and public space, Anne E. Marshall, "The 1906 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Law and the Politics of Race and Memory in Early-Twentieth Century Kentucky," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (September 2011): 394-408.

<sup>28</sup>Fleming to Owen, October 15, 1906, Individuals, A-P, SG016713, AF-TO, ADAH.

there was no chance that that truth could be used against him. “Let the truth out,” Owen continued, “confess the errors of the past, and get a lesson from them for future guidance.”<sup>29</sup>

Owen did support the town councils, but not because Dixon deserved censorship. He felt compelled to note “in defense of our Southern town councils...their action in the premises was based largely on a consideration of common prudence.” He added that because of “the present condition and temper of the Southern people on the race question...we may expect to see and experience strange things...in the next few years...We must husband our resources and be brave for the coming issue, whatever it may be.”<sup>30</sup> Did this foreboding and cryptic remark have to do with a possible future increase in lynch mobs and race riots, such as the pogrom that had wracked Atlanta only a month before, after a stage production of *The Clansman*? Or did Owen worry that more and more, well-meaning white southern leaders might censor any enunciation of the Lost Cause?<sup>31</sup>

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There was understandably much Lost Cause commentary from Owen in his capacity as USCV historian-general, head of the Alabama Division, and commander-in-chief. And as mentioned earlier in regard to acquisitions, there was not always a neat separation between the director’s extracurricular activities and his main line of work. Some of what Owen wrote or

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Published studies and interactive dramatizations probing the outbreak of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot identify Dixon’s writings as one of the more inflammatory components, Rebecca Burns, *Rage in the Gate City: The Story of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); “Four Days of Fury: Atlanta, 1906,” by Addae Moon, directed by Catherine Hughes, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, February 22 – 24, September 20-23, 2013.

spoke in regards to the Sons informed his ostensibly “objective” position as head of the archives. Historian-General Owen, for example, consistently pressed the camps to produce historical work. The end product to be sure had to be “impartial history, true in every fact and inference”; nothing less would suffice, neither “imperfect” nor “partial” histories. Owen wanted camps to follow the evidentiary trail wherever it might lead. “The truth,” declared Owen, “even where it discredits, should be sought. The truth, even presented with such infirmities, will afford sufficient glory.”<sup>32</sup>

Yet the quest for truth had to start (and preferably end?) with safe, non-political topics. Owen provided several starting points for those who were out of ideas, mostly on the military side: “‘The history of the \_\_\_ regiment, C.S.A.,’ ‘The campaign of \_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_,’ ... ‘Early campaigns of the War,’ ‘Jackson’s Valley Campaign,’ ‘Shiloh,’ ‘Vicksburg,’ ‘War on the Border,’ ‘Military leaders’....” Camps could stand to benefit from a little archival organization and precision too. “We will make positive additions to the stock of available information,” Owen informed Camp James T. Holtzclaw, “if in the compilation of papers, the unwritten and published recollections of survivors were secured, digested, and arranged in a systematic way.” The veterans living in Montgomery, “more than two hundred and fifty intelligent and observant survivors...will be glad to help” the camp.<sup>33</sup>

These were in the way of general suggestions, not a one-size fits-all program. All sorts of men joined the Sons, and their knowledge, interests, and the limits of their involvement had to be taken into account. “[Some] members will be profoundly interested,” Owen told a Louisiana camp historian. “Others will be found who have acquired an imperfect conception of the cause

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<sup>32</sup>“Collection of Historical Materials,” 130.

<sup>33</sup>*Circular No. 3*, November 1, 1905, Address, July 6, 1910, United Sons of Confederate Veterans, SG016730, AF-TO, ADAH.

of the war.” Still others would have “no appreciation of the magnitude and extent of the struggle.” Many, perhaps most, Sons “will be ready to tell you that they are interested in the general subject” but might not want to conduct deep research. The historical committees must respect their wishes rather than compel them to do what they did not want to do. Although the USCV’s mission was to disseminate a partisan view of the past, camp leaders also had to guard against “excess of zeal.” Owen did not want the organization to “resolve itself into a glorification society.”<sup>34</sup>

At the Sons’ 1907 national meeting, Commander-in-Chief Owen sounded more-or-less confident that the organization’s historical work was having effect. As far as the struggle for correct textbooks and archive-building was concerned, “We are on higher ground than ever before.” But it was important not to rest on laurels. Owen planned to compile a Confederate history handbook “to embrace in accurate and brief compass the principal facts...for the period 1850 to 1876” and “to present the Southern view on all questions.” He also meant to expunge the ‘baseless misrepresentation and slander’ of the late Robert Ingersoll by removing a plaque featuring one of his anti-southern speeches from Arlington, if he had to go and tear it off himself. Owen’s interest in history allegedly had originated in 1889 because of Ingersoll’s attacks on the South. Now, Owen had petitioned Ingersoll’s friend President Roosevelt to get rid of the plaque; Roosevelt had not deigned to answer. Clearly, Owen told the Sons, “[the president] is a partisan

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<sup>34</sup>*Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Reunion of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans in the City of Richmond, Virginia, May 30-June 3, 1907* (Nashville: Brandon, 1908), 65-68.

[who] has no love for the South, or for its traditions,” a moral leper “wanting in the courage necessary to do a simple act of justice to our people.”<sup>35</sup>

And the injustices seemed to multiply every year. By the 1910 reunion Owen, with his second tenure as historian-general about to end, was worried about the future. He spoke direly of sinister anti-southern “commercialism...invading the Southland” and implored the Sons to “get...in form for [a] fierce struggle” against it:

[W]e must stand together for monuments in each county and city, and we must stand together for a correct history in our schools to be taught to our children and to our children’s children, and to the children and the children’s children of the men of the North... You have...placed on me the duty of collecting not only the events of the war...but the problems and questions that precipitated the conflict...and the more tragic years that followed from 1865 to 1876, when the white people of the South finally got [back] possession of their respective governments...<sup>36</sup>

On occasions Owen chastised fellow Southerners who were not inscribing “correct” history or monuments. He was unhappy with the decision of Mrs. Bibb Graves, president of the Alabama UDC, to erect a marker at the site where General Forrest had finally surrendered his men. Owen thought that was not an incident to commemorate because it had never happened. Forrest “did not surrender,” he noted by way of clarification, “but merely held his men...for

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<sup>35</sup>*Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Reunion*, 17, 176-177.

<sup>36</sup>*15<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion, U.S.C.V., April 25, 26, 27 and 28, 1910, Mobile, Alabama* (N. p.), n. p.

parole by the Federal authorities.” Forrest’s superiors had made the decision to surrender; if the Alabama Daughters wanted to put up a marker for them, that was fine.<sup>37</sup> This was a semantic point between *parole* and *surrender*, the type that Lost Cause disciples such as Owen latched onto to salvage white southern dignity here and there in the historical record. Forrest’s stature as a Confederate commander who according to some was never defeated in battle made it all the more critical to protect his honor.

The director had a soft spot anyway for unyielding Confederates like Forrest, and John DuBose. After a train ran over the irascible, deaf DuBose in 1918, Owen paid tribute to his former office assistant in the *Advertiser*. DuBose had inspired Owen’s interest in history, and his Yancey biography had long been one of Owen’s favorites. His writing had a “brilliant and striking style, wholly original,” which Owen liked. Although DuBose “delighted in controversy,” that quirk made him all the more fun to be around. “His devotion to the Confederate Cause knew no bounds,” Owen notably remembered. “He delighted in exploring the original documents of that great struggle, and his own experiences...gave weight to his contributions to the History of the War of Secession.”<sup>38</sup>

Writing to other ex-Confederates, Owen also offered comfort while trying to look on the bright side. He agreed with George C. McCormack, a veteran of the 59<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment who had donated an 1863 order book, that “[there] were trying years from 1861 to 1865.” Civilization and constitutional issues had been at stake “which...could have perhaps...only been brought to a determined conclusion by unparalleled sacrifices and the loss of

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<sup>37</sup>Owen to Mrs. John N. Brownson, January 25, 1917, Correspondence, SG016701, AF-TO, ADAH.

<sup>38</sup>“Tribute to John W. DuBose,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 16, 1918.

thousands of human lives.” McCormack should mourn his dead comrades and, as he said, “draw the mantle of Charity (if there is any of it left)” over the hard things that might make him hate his late enemies. Otherwise he could rejoice that “with all this the struggle was not in vain” because of its moral effects. “In no period of human history,” Owen assured McCormack, “are there to be found such a multitude of those examples of conduct and life which are to leave and make better all the generations to come.”<sup>39</sup>

In yet another letter to a Confederate veteran, Owen provided the longest exposition he ever wrote on the Lost Cause and his relationship with it. His correspondent was John Inzer, the former colonel of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment (Appendix 5). Owen begins the letter by personally identifying with the “old Confederacy, its principles and its memories.” He then commiserates with the embittered Inzer over the “untoward fate of the Confederacy.” After years of study and reflection he still cannot understand why the Cause was lost, because it represented not just a nation fighting for survival, but also a more perfect human society. He disavows any hostility towards the current United States government, yet he cannot help dwelling on what white Southerners lost fighting against its predecessor. He speaks of “shattering of hopes,” “immensity of loss,” and other “appalling” things “to contemplate.”

His senses and his secular reasoning left overwhelmed, Owen turns to his Protestant God to find comfort in resignation if not explanations. He compares the finite years of human beings with the infinite essence of the Almighty. He confesses that white Southerners cannot know how events in their lifetimes will unfold, much less control them. Their only agency is “to play [a]

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<sup>39</sup>George C. McCormack to Owen, September 25, 1911, Owen to McCormack, September 26, 1911, Correspondence, SG016705, AF-TO, ADAH.

part in the most heroic way.” Therein lies the key to accepting the downfall of the Confederacy: the journey matters more than the destination, the building of the travelers’ characters is more important than their ultimate success or failure. And so Inzer and his fellow veterans won, after all, because they passed the Divine test by proving themselves worthy men. Additionally, they have made their reunited nation better by surviving to guide it. Were there not a “leaven of fine influence of Confederate principles,” the United States would be hardly worth living in. Thinking further on this issue, Owen wonders momentarily if it even that is true.

And maybe it is up to Owen’s generation to save the day. Owen notes that he “was reared in an atmosphere full of love for the Confederacy,” so it was natural that when he became a man he would take up his father’s mantle. His duty, obviously, is not to fight, but to honor those who fought by saving and collecting their memories. Amongst all of Owen’s responsibilities, commemoration of the war years comes first. When he has become exhausted with the work, he has reminded himself that in light of the war’s gravitas, his mortal complaints are puny. Fear of oblivion swallowing up the Cause pushes Owen daily towards excellence; he will not let this happen on his watch! With the help of the USCV, Owen has done much good work, and like the veterans he professes to be certain that his legacy will outlive him.<sup>40</sup>

Owen’s letter to Inzer explains nearly everything about his relationship to the creed that defined his life and provided him a job. His Lost Cause sentiments are by turns wistful, perplexed, penitent, questioning, hopeful, doubtful, proud, and humble. Owen’s Lost Cause focuses on southern victims---or at least, victims of a certain race---rather than northern victors. It exalts its own sufferings because these are the sufferings of the righteous. It deals in vague

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<sup>40</sup>Owen to John W. Inzer, January 27, 1910, CRHF, 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, ADAH.

generalities so as to avoid the troubling specificities that attend it. It cannot accept the judgment of combat in the moral sense (although it claims to abide by the new normal), but on the other hand, it has full faith in the verdict of history. It will behave itself, but it will not concede a single jot of self-respect to the other side. It is determined to win even in losing.

Yet we also should note that Owen held back, even in this piece of deeply personal correspondence. There were limits to stubborn defiance. In public Owen generally played nice. Fostering white reconciliation, albeit on southern cultural terms, was always good policy to him. America's entry into World War I provided the chance to push this policy forward. Once northern recruits began training south of the Mason-Dixon Line, they often became accustomed to southern ways and amenable to southern thinking. Northern doughboys might even start singing southern tunes. Owen was delighted to report that the commander at Camp Gordon in Atlanta had asked a federal judge and former Confederate to teach the soldiers the "Rebel Yell." That trademarked battlefield screech would terrify America's enemies on the Western Front, Owen opined, just as it had terrified those who first heard in the 1860s. More than the tactical force multiplier it offered, however, Owen regarded the yell as an incantation of national beliefs. By learning to yell like the old Confederates, American soldiers became one. Owen's devotion "to the South and to the glorious history of the Confederate state," he admitted, could not be compared to his gladness "that our present national crisis is bringing our people to a better understanding." Through the soldiers the people "are getting better acquainted and are coming to a degree of mutual appreciation which means well for the future of our common country."<sup>41</sup> Perhaps after America won the war, thanks to the Rebel Yell, its citizens would stop criticizing each other over sectional peculiarities.

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<sup>41</sup>"The Rebel Yell," *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 17, 1917.

Reconciliation stimulated by war should go both ways. Owen acknowledged as much on Lincoln's Birthday in 1918. Again, the ongoing conflict suggested how to bring white Northerners and Southerners closer together. The war in Europe had to be won on the battlefield, for which the Confederacy and its allegedly better military commanders was an appropriate model. "Today," Owen noted, "in the military camps, the strategy of Lee and Jackson is studied while European strategists are merely carrying out the on a larger scale the tactics used by...Confederate generals." Ultimate victory would require more than breaking through the German trenches however. It would require high-caliber political leadership to secure the peace. Jefferson Davis had been that kind of leader, but Owen ranked Lincoln a bit higher. The South should accept Owen's verdict on this point by collectively setting aside February 12 as a holiday, just as in northern states. That would be "only one of the many incidents showing the growing unity of the nation."<sup>42</sup>

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Reviewing overall what Owen spoke or wrote about the Lost Cause, two characteristics are clear. When he waxed nostalgic about the Old South, the war, and the overthrow of the carpetbaggers, Owen was either writing a private letter or addressing the like-minded. In contrast he tended to keep his official remarks succinct and professional, presenting southern "history" as a neutral place and himself as a disinterested investigator. Because Owen never explained the rationale behind these differing private and public personas, we can only speculate about his motivations. It could be that Owen wanted his department to appear to be beyond partisanship. Perhaps he wanted to maintain good relationships with northern institutions like

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<sup>42</sup>"Welding the Sections," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 12, 1918.

the Wisconsin Historical Society and northern professional scholars. Or perhaps he assumed different masks with different interest groups in order to bring them all together. Owen may have been thoroughly pragmatic, or thoroughly cynical, telling people whatever they wanted to hear from him. Or, it could be that he sought to keep pro-Confederates mobilized and ready for new threats without tipping his hand.

Owen also never espoused outright hate for the South's supposed enemies. That of course was due in part to his post-bellum birth, his comfortable social status, and his many accomplishments in life, to say nothing of the conventions of decorum prevailing in southern society and the professional historical community. Yet those attributes did not restrain so many others of his caste. Notably, there are no racial slurs in Owen's private writings, even though his honest, unspoken views of African Americans were probably as racist as John DuBose's or Walter Fleming's. By way of comparison, Owen's contemporary Dunbar Rowland, who copied the Alabama archives when he established the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), regularly peppered his speeches and writings with race-baiting.<sup>43</sup> When reading Owen's words by contrast, it is difficult to discern any notes therein of anger, hatred, or despair; sadness, certainly, and longing, but nothing rancorous. Mostly Owen comes across as a poised and graceful fellow of the New South, happy enough with where circumstances placed him and ready to get to work helping others understand the past as he did. Implicitly he seems assured too that amicable, inoffensive, upwardly mobile white males like himself will rule the roost for centuries to come.

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<sup>43</sup>Galloway, "Archives, Power, and History."

Up to his last days Owen stayed busy and outgoing, to the detriment of his health. Wartime work for the United States Army's library program and the constant battle to increase the ADAH's space and funding ran him ragged. His wife Marie and several of Owen's friends worried that he was overworking himself, and begged him to cut back on some social engagements and projects. Owen's father and father-in-law had recently passed away. A bout with influenza during the 1918-1919 pandemic left Owen severely weakened, but the following spring found him back on his feet. On the evening of March 25, 1920, Owen went to a meeting of The Thirteen and spoke in defense of the Volstead Act "as a...policy for the furtherance of morals." Attendees recalled that he also "said a few feeling words" on the recent death of a club member. "After bidding his club mates good night," a newspaper later reported, "he returned home, greeted Mrs. Owen, and discussed the meeting...He retired to an adjoining room to prepare for bed" around 11 p.m. "when Mrs. Owen heard him fall. When [she] reached his side he was dead." Cardiac arrest had claimed him at the age of 53.<sup>44</sup>

The eulogies poured in, but few were as heartfelt as the *Advertiser's*. "The news of his death will be heard with profound sorrow throughout Alabama," lamented the editor, "and it will be heard with sympathetic regret in the historical and literary circles of the country...Dr. Owen was a man of culture and study – one who had from early manhood a broad intellectual life...He was a man of commanding appearance – one who would be singled out in any assemblage as a leader of intellectual power...He was noted for his great courtesy in all his official and social relations." Alabama's political leaders hastened to offer their condolences. Governor Thomas Kilby declared that "Alabama has suffered an irreparable loss...As director and founder of the department of archives and history he rendered service of immeasurable benefit to the state."

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<sup>44</sup>"Doctor Thomas M. Owen Expires Suddenly," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 26, 1920.

Others agreed. “Dr. Owen was a splendid type of southern gentleman,” Secretary of State W. P. Cobb tellingly commented, “and he will be sorely missed in social and official circles.” The Game and Fish Commissioner described Owen as “a great leader of men and a profound thinker, a man whose brilliant personality, courage, culture and sterling qualities of mind and heart have had a most refining effect.” The *Birmingham News* considered him Alabama’s premiere historian, “a man...of searching memory of names and places and dates; one to whom the least bit of historical data was a portal to larger circumstances; one who held that the slightest record of some seemingly unimportant event preservation, and study and analysis...” The Montgomery Library Association, which closed in respect of Owen’s funeral, composed a memorial that ended, “A man of rare worth was among us and is gone, but in truth...he shall live again in his work.”<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding the Library Association’s assertion, there was momentary fear that Owen’s legacy was in danger. The *Advertiser* put it plainly that “[Those] who were informed of his death...after the first shock was over said, ‘Who can possibly fill his place?’ This was a reflection of general Alabama opinion...” Owen gone, his proposed War Memorial to Alabama’s World War I soldiers might remain stalled. More importantly, Owen’s death exposed an unclear leadership succession for the ADAH. Some suggested that Peter A. Brannon, the

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<sup>45</sup>“Doctor Thomas M. Owen Expires Suddenly”; “Dr. Thos. M. Owen Dies Suddenly Thursday Night,” *Montgomery Times*, March 26, 1920; “Although An Inconspicuous Servant, Dr. Owen Served Alabama In Great Ways,” *Birmingham News*, March 27, 1920; “City Library Body Pays A Tribute To Dr. Thomas M. Owen,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 28, 1920.

archives' museum curator, should become the next director, but he had been stricken with typhoid fever at almost the same time Owen died, and might not recover.<sup>46</sup>

With Brannon incapacitated, the board of trustees looked at other candidates. They soon settled on Owen's widow, who took over on April 1. The press approved of putting the well-connected Marie Owen at the head of the Alabama archives. She "is better fitted to finish this work than any one that can be thought of at this time," declared the *Tuscaloosa News*. Not only was Marie Owen "a woman of broad education, fine intelligence and excellent poise," the *Advertiser* echoed, she was in good company, for "It is said there are several women in the country holding similar places." In point of fact, and as the *Selma Times-Journal* pointed out, the new director had neither contemporaries nor predecessors for her position: "Mrs. Owen is receiving congratulations from various sections of the United States [as] she is the first woman to be made the head of a state history department."<sup>47</sup> Great---and maybe unrealistic---expectations crowned Marie Owen's head mere weeks after her husband had been laid to rest.

A new chapter began for the Alabama Department of Archives and History with the ascension of Marie Owen. Over her thirty-five years as director, she pursued a dramatically different policy from her dearly departed Thomas, prioritizing the collection of artifacts and objects over papers new and old. She bravely faced politically-motivated audits and hostile commentary from male officials convinced that she was not fulfilling her main, archival duties, and absorbed charges that she had betrayed her husband's legacy and ruined his department. She

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<sup>46</sup>"Doctor Thomas M. Owen Expires Suddenly"; "State And National Flags At Half Mast In Memory Of Owen," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 27, 1920

<sup>47</sup>"Mrs. Owen Mentioned As the Successor to Dr. Thomas M. Owen," *Tuscaloosa News*, March 29, 1920; "Suggest Mrs. Owen As Archives Curator," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 29, 1920; "Fills Husband's Position," *Tuscaloosa News*, April 2, 1920; "Mrs. Owen Given High Honor," *Selma Times-Journal*, April 3, 1920.

had to overcome retributive efforts to defund the wayward ADAH by flexing her family's political muscle. An independent Legislative Reference Service (established in 1954) and a Special Collections department at the University of Alabama (established in 1965) underscored her archives' increasing irrelevance to policy making and research. And in the interim, she watched as other organizations, principally the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), first emulated and then surpassed the Alabama archives in professional and technical excellence.<sup>48</sup>

Compelling and contentious as Marie Owen's directorship was in the context of archival history, it lies beyond the purview of this work. Her challenges were still many years ahead when she began to edit Thomas' intended magnum opus---an enormous assortment of historical and biographical articles on Alabama---and to contact publishing companies about picking it up. She knew well how her late husband had longed to be a great writer yet never quite had the opportunity to blossom. "It was of this sense of pity for him," Marie Owen noted, "in his failure to reach [the] goal he had set himself, with the added sense too, of a duty to the people of Alabama, who looked to him to write their history, that I dared...to attempt the task" of completing it.<sup>49</sup>

Yet to his everlasting credit, Owen not only enabled many others to write the history of Alabama, he inspired the preservation of historical materials in most southern states. The history he valued most, of course, was of a certain era and a particular viewpoint. Owen made collecting Civil War records with a pro-Confederate slant the Alabama archive's historic *raison d'etre*. He

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<sup>48</sup>Jakeman, "Marie Bankhead Owen and the Alabama Department of Archives and History."

<sup>49</sup>"Dr. Owen's Great Alabama History," *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 11, 1921.

shaped the department into a documentary sanctum where Confederate veterans, white visitors, and pro-southern historians felt welcome. He disseminated many pro-Confederate arguments by encouraging research and writing in archival, scholarly, and commercial publishing realms. And he often articulated strident defenses of the Old South, the Confederacy, and the rise of Jim Crow whether in public history programs or in the copious pages of his personal letters. With the ADAH, Owen built an enduring tabernacle to the Lost Cause.

In this light, Owen's final gift to Alabama, the South, and the Cause was of a piece with his life and career. His posthumous *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* finally appeared at last in 1921, in four large volumes. Modestly, Owen did not mention the ADAH at all. The two-page entry for "Alabama, Periods of History," is a restatement of his first piece of writing, the 1892 newspaper article. Of the eight epochs mentioned, Owen connected the last two as follows: "After the close of hostilities [in 1865] and for nine long and bitter years the people of the state struggled with poverty, ruined fortunes, pernicious reconstruction laws and an element in political power foreign to them and their institutions. Finally the dawn came in the rescue of the state...From [then] to the present its growth has been upward."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, Volume I* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1921): 14.

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2<sup>nd</sup> Alabama Cavalry

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8<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

10<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

12<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

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21<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry

25<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

26<sup>th</sup>/50<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

30<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

35<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

36<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

40<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry

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Appendix 1. Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) Statement of  
Recommitment, June 23, 2020

As our state and nation struggle to navigate through a place of contention, fear, and uncertainty, the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) recommits itself to the mission of illuminating the path that brought us here, and thereby equipping all of us, together, to build a future characterized by justice, human dignity, and a commitment to the wellbeing of all people.

Our recommitment includes acknowledgment of these truths.

1. Systemic racism remains a reality in American society, despite belief in racial equality on the part of most individuals. Historically, our governments, our economy, and many private institutions seeded or perpetuated discrimination against racial minorities to the political, economic, and social advantage of whites. The decline of overt bigotry in mainstream society has not erased the legacies of blatantly racist systems that operated for hundreds of years.

2. The ADAH is, in significant part, rooted in this legacy. The State of Alabama founded the department in 1901 to address a lack of proper management of government records, but also to serve a white southern concern for the preservation of Confederate history and the promotion of Lost Cause ideals. For well over a half-century, the agency committed extensive resources to the acquisition of Confederate records and artifacts while declining to acquire and preserve materials documenting the lives and contributions of African Americans in Alabama.

3. As an organization, we remain mostly white, especially in agency leadership and in our archival and curatorial staffs. Even with a serious, sustained commitment to understand the historical roots of injustice and its present manifestations, we cannot know the full measure of fear and frustration experienced by African Americans who have lived different realities in the past and today. We listen and study with intent and with sympathy, but our understanding requires ongoing work.

Our recommitment includes these objectives.

4. We will continue and expand efforts of the past four decades to document and tell a fully inclusive story of Alabama's role in the American experience. If history is to serve the present, it must offer an honest assessment of the past.

5. We will be a facilitator of public dialogue, seeking opportunities to build bridges through mutually respectful discussions of personal, community, and state history. These voices will help shape our exhibitions and public programs.

6. We will pursue greater diversity at the ADAH through robust recruitment initiatives. These will include introducing high school students to career opportunities in public history and providing paid internships to undergraduate and graduate students. We will offer a welcoming, inclusive community of colleagues, and meaningful opportunities to contribute to the work of the agency.

7. We will model and advocate for responsible stewardship of historical materials held by collecting institutions as well as in the public square. As communities struggle with decisions over Confederate iconography, we assert that options are not limited to static persistence, on the one hand, or to destruction on the other.

Our recommitment includes the continued development of resources such as the following, useful for gaining a greater understanding of racism's origins and consequences.

8. We the People: Alabama's Defining Documents was a special exhibition of Alabama's six constitutions during 2019, the state's bicentennial year. The exhibit website and catalog let the historical record speak for itself in explaining how Alabama law stacked the deck against African Americans during slavery, after emancipation, and for two-thirds of the way through the twentieth century.

9. Family history can be a challenging pursuit for anyone, sometimes resulting in dead ends and unanswered questions. For African Americans, genealogy comes with added complexity because black ancestors almost universally lived in slavery. When African Americans can be found in antebellum historical records, it is often in a bill of sale written by a slave trader or in an estate inventory, listed alongside livestock and pieces of furniture. To better understand how race has bearing even on researching family history, watch our two-part guide to "Tracing Your African American Ancestors."

10. For more than thirty years, the Friends of the Alabama Archives have sponsored Food for Thought, a monthly lecture series bringing scholarship to public audiences. On our YouTube channel, explore playlists containing talks on topics such as “Slavery, Emancipation, and Reconstruction,” “Race and Equal Rights,” or “The Civil Rights Movement.”

11. Take a visual journey through African American community life in the 1960s with the Jim Pepler Southern Courier Photograph Collection, containing eleven thousand images of political activism, religious life, music, sports, and black neighborhoods.

12. Find more content from the ADAH and our partners at Alabama History@Home.

Source: Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) website, accessed June 29, 2020,

[https://archives.alabama.gov/docs/ADAH\\_Statement\\_Recommitment\\_200623.pdf](https://archives.alabama.gov/docs/ADAH_Statement_Recommitment_200623.pdf).

Appendix 2. Manuscript materials donated to the ADAH, April 1901 – July 1902

<u>Date</u>	<u>Donor</u>	<u>Item(s) donated &amp; Owen's notes</u>
April 2, 1901	Jenkins, Mrs. E. B.	Muster roll, Calhoun Sharpshooters
April 2, 1901	Jenkins, Mrs. E. B.	Captain Bush's Home Guards Company (Calhoun Co)
April 2, 1901	Jenkins, Mrs. E. B.	Muster roll, Calhoun Guards
April 27, 1901	Lewis, Thomas H. (MN)	Documents from the battlefield of Blakely
July 1, 190	Jelks, William D. (Governor)	Sketch of "Dixie Eagles," 3 <sup>rd</sup> AL Inf Reg, from 1899 newspaper
July 3, 1901	McIver, D W	Tuskegee newspapers
July 8, 1901	Beers, George W	Printed broadside: roll of Co G, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Al Inf
July 8, 1901	Persons, Anna (Semmes Chapter UDC)	1863 pay roll, Co D, 37 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
July 9, 1901	Bates, S Jefferson	Notes, history of Waddell's/Emery's batteries

July 15, 1901	Reece, M. E. (Semmes Chapter UDC)	Muster roll Co H, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL Inf--- returned to another woman
July 15, 1901	George, P. C.	Muster roll Co K, 12 <sup>th</sup> AI Inf
July 19, 1901	Bellamy, Capt. R. H.	1862 Descriptive roll, Waddell's Battery
July 19, 1901	Bellamy, Capt. R. H.	Miniature presentation flag, Waddell's Battery
August 2, 1901	McRae, L M	Muster roll Co B, 56 <sup>th</sup> AI Inf
August 10, 1901	Lomax, Tennent	Notes, 2 <sup>nd</sup> AI Inf
August 20, 1901	Inzer, Col John W	Sketch, 58 <sup>th</sup> AI Inf
August 25, 1901	Johnston, Miss Belle	"Valuable old War Scrapbook, 1860- 62"
September 3, 1901	McMorris, E Y	15 blanks w/ personal history & military record of John W. A. Sanford Camp, UCV
September 3, 1901	Hannon, Mrs Moses	14 letters (May 1862 – May 1865), mostly from Genl Philip D Roddey

September 4, 1901	McMillan, B S	Compiled roll Co H 17 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
September 4, 1901	McMillan, B S	W McMillan's reminiscences, 14 <sup>th</sup> Al inf
September 7, 1901	Weeden, Col John D	Field/staff roster, 49 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf
September 8, 1901	Moody, Dr Joseph	Sketch of Lumsden's Battery
September 8, 1901	Moody, Dr Joseph	Roster, Lumsden's Battery
October 14, 1901	Handley, Hon W A	Muster roll, Co F 25 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf, 1860- 1864
October 14, 1901	Handley, Hon W A	Muster roll, Co F 25 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf, 4 months in early 1862
October 14, 1901	Handley, Hon W A	Return, Co F 25 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf, for June 1862
October 14, 1901	Handley, Hon W A	Muster roll, Co F 25 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf, mid- 1863
October 19, 1901	Brewer, Capt George	Sketch, 46 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
October 29, 1901	Williams, E W	Compiled roll Co B, 46 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
November 1, 1901	Godfrey, Capt L D	Roster, Co of 5 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf Btn

November 4, 1901	Owen, Thomas M	Muster roll Co D, 43 <sup>rd</sup> Al Inf
November 4, 1901	Owen, Thomas M	Roll, Co D, 9 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
November 4, 1901	Owen, Thomas M	Roll, Co C, 27 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
November 4, 1901	Owen, Thomas M	Roll, Co C, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Al Cav
November 4, 1901	Owen, Thomas M	Roll, Co of 60 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf
November 5, 1901	Bellamy, Capt. R. H.	Notes, Waddell's Battery
November 14, 1901	Stockdale, J L	Muster roll, Co A, 8 <sup>th</sup> Confed Cav
November 18, 1901	Porter, John H	Muster roll & descriptive list, Co A, 59 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
November 19, 1901	Reece, M. E. (Semmes Chapter UDC)	Compiled roll, Co A, 53 <sup>rd</sup> Al Inf
November 21, 1901	Reid, George E	Roll, Co F, 23 <sup>rd</sup> Al Inf
November 21, 1901	Sands, Col R M	Commissions, major & lt col, 3 <sup>rd</sup> AL Inf, May 1862 and August 1863
November 21, 1901	Sands, Col R M	Reports, Seven Days' Battles
November 25, 1901	Baker, Mrs Alpheus	Gen Baker's diary

November 29, 1901	Pope, Miss Mattie N	Compiled roll, Mobile Rifles, 1861
November 29, 1901	Sophie Bibb Chapter UDC	Roll, Co E, 1 <sup>st</sup> Al Heavy Art Btn
November 29, 1901	Sophie Bibb Chapter UDC	Copy of muster roll, 8 <sup>th</sup> Confed Cav, 1864
December 3, 1901	Oden, D B	Compiled roll, Co K, 12 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
December 13, 1901	Owen, Thomas M	Printed roll, Co of 60 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
January 8, 1902	Howard, Miss Annette	Compiled list, Co H, 61 <sup>st</sup> Al Inf
January 8, 1902	Howard, Miss Annette	Compiled list, Co of 4 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf
January 8, 1902	Howard, Miss Annette	Compiled list, Co F, 12 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf
January 8, 1902	Howard, Miss Annette	Compiled list, Co of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Al
January 8, 1902	Howard, Miss Annette	Compiled list, war dead at "Tuskegee and vicinity"
February 14, 1902	Woods, Col M L	Notes, history 46 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf
February 21, 1902	Curry, M B	Compiled roll, Co I, 7 <sup>th</sup> Al Cav
February 21, 1902	Curry, M B	Morning report, Co B, 19 <sup>th</sup> Al Inf, March 1865

March 14, 1902	McLemore, Miss B C	Muster roll, Co I, 37 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf
March 28, 1902	Thach, C	Roll of Co A, 14 <sup>th</sup> AL
April 14, 1902	McCain, J M (Lt, Co D, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL)	Roll of Co D, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL
April 14, 1902	McCain, J M (Lt, Co D, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL)	Roll of Co E, 5 <sup>th</sup> AI
April 14, 1902	McCain, J M (Lt, Co D, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL)	Roll of Co A, 10 <sup>th</sup> AL
April 14, 1902	McCain, J M (Lt, Co D, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL)	Field/staff roster, 5 <sup>th</sup> AL Inf
July 17, 1902	Berry, Randle	Muster rolls, 28 <sup>th</sup> AI Inf
July 26, 1902	McMorries, E D	Muster rolls, Cos C, E, F, and G, 1 <sup>st</sup> AL Inf

Source: Registers of Gifts and Purchases of Books and Pamphlets, 1901-1978 (Access  
Restricted), ADAH, Montgomery

Appendix 3. Potential donations of manuscript materials, March – October 1901

<u>Date</u>	<u>Potential Donor</u>	<u>Owen's notes</u>
March 4, 1901	Ely, B F	"Old muster rolls and war papers"
May 6, 1901	King, Marshall*	"War papers"
May 21, 1901	Coleman, F N	"Roll of Co G, 40th AI"
May 27, 1901	Jones, George	"Old Roll of the Mobile Cadets, 1861"
May 28, 1901	Howell, W P	"Roll of Co D in the 25th AL"
June 1, 1901	Wright, Rev Mr (Baptist")	"Made speech producing flag to Co C, 11th AL"
June 5, 1901	Rountree, W J	"Rolls of Col Reid's 28th AL"
June 5, 1901	Waite, W E	"War papers and relics"
June 5, 1901	Harris, R G*	"Records of Selden's Battery"
June 6, 1901	Kent, Mrs James	"Papers of 44th AL"
June 6, 1901	Craig, B H	"Muster roll of Cahaba Rifles"
June 6, 1901	Pettus, E W	"Probably has papers as to his brigade"

June 6, 1901	Coleman, Judge A	"Papers of 40th AL"
June 6, 1901	Dawson, Henry	"Probably has roll of Mobile Cadets, commanded by his father"
June 6, 1901	Gulley, Mrs Ezekiel	"Wife of Lt Col of 40th Al and may have war papers"
June 13, 1901	Babcock, John	"Roll of Cahaba Rifles"
June 26, 1901	Pitts, Samuel	"Reminiscences of regiment"
June 27, 1901	Swanson, W C	"Has company book of Carter's Company, 45th Al"
July 1, 1901	Grayson, J W	"Roll of Company E, 27th Tenn"
July 5, 1901	Beers, George*	"Roster, Company G, 3rd AL"
July 5, 1901	Johnston, David	"Roster of Tuskegee Light Infantry"
July 9, 1901	Wood, F S	"Can give data as to Co E, 50th Al"
July 9, 1901	Henderson, Perry S	"Can give data as to Co E, 50th Al"
July 9, 1901	Hyde, L H	"Can give data as to Co E, 50th Al"
July 11, 1901	Porter, J H*	"Roll of Company A, 59th AL"
July 15, 1901	Leech, Capt E C	"Records and papers of the 26th AL"

July 16, 1901	Pitts, Samuel	"History of his command in Conf War"
August 12, 1901	Thompson, Joseph N	"Records of 35th AL"
August 13, 1901	Williams, Milton	"Company B, 46th AL"
August 13, 1901	Edwards, William	"Company B, 46th AL"
August 13, 1901	Blake, Isaac	"Company B, 46th AL"
August 29, 1901	Rowan, B C	"Old papers of Colonel R M Sands, relating to 3rd AL"
October 4, 1901	Davis, Capt J S	"Sketch of 15th Conf Cav"
October 14, 1901	Jones, Capt George H	"Can prepare history of Mobile Cadets. Has original muster rolls"
October 1901, n.d.	Welsh, R. G.	"Rolls of 34th AI"

\* indicates later donation

Source: Registers of Gifts and Purchases of Books and Pamphlets, 1901-1978 (Access  
Restricted), ADAH, Montgomery

Appendix 4. Images donated to the ADAH, 1901 – 1913

1901

“Judge Oliver Fitts”

“Judge William Crawford and wife”

“Col. John McKee”

“William L. Yancey”\*

“Gen. Braxton Bragg”\*

“Col. M. L. Stansell”\*

“Gen. Tennent Lomax”\*

“Gen. William W. Allen”\*

“The Bench and Bar of Birmingham”

“Gen. Robert E. Lee”\*

“Gov. A. P. Bagby”

“The Constitutional Convention of  
1875”

“Gen S. D. Lee”\*

“Hon. Preston Brooks”†

“Gen. Zach Deas”\*

“The Grave of Osceola”

“The [John C.] Calhoun Monument”†

“The Staff Officers of the 24<sup>th</sup> Al.  
Regt.”\*

“The Alabama Legislature of 1901-1902”

1902

“Hilary A. Herbert”\*

“Gen. Alpheus Baker”\*

“Theodore O’hara, Lt. Co. 12<sup>th</sup> Ala. Regt.”\*

“Gov. John Gayle”

“Henry M. Tarrant”

“Dixon H. Lewis”

“William L. Yancey”\*

“The Old State bank building”

“Gen. Wager Swayne”∞

“Dr. Peter Bryce”

“Dexter Avenue, Montgomery, 1850”

“John A. Elmore”

“Judah P. Benjamin”\*

“Gov. Wm. C. Oates”\*

“Gen. Danville Ledbetter”\*

“Group [picture] of the members of  
the Constitutional Convention of  
Alabama, 1901”

“John B. Knox”

“Gov. Winthrop Sargent”

“Gen. Leroy P. Walker”\*

“Col. E. C. Bullock”\*

“Judge Reuben Saffold and wife”

“Emma Sansom”†

“Dr. J. Marion Sims”

“Dr. John Allen Wyeth”\*

“Henry W. Hilliard”\*

“Gov. R[obert] F. Ligon”\*

“Gov. W. H. Moren”

“Gen. Isham W. Garrott”\*

“Judge Wm. D. Martin”

“Thomas Bibb Bradley and Robert  
Chambers”

“John A. Elmore, a soldier of the Revolution”

### 1903

“Col. G. C. Russell”

“F. S. Lyon”\*

“Battle of Mobile Bay”

“Benj. Fitzpatrick”

“Lithograph of [Robert E.] Lee’s farewell”†

“Gen. M. W. Hannon”\*

“3 Types of Confed. Soldiers”†

“T. B. Goldsby”

“Bishops of the Diocese of Ala.”

“John G. Shorter”\*

“John Pelham”\*

“C. T. Pollard”

“Dr. Nathan Bozeman”

“Howell Rose”

“John B. Taylor”

“J. H. Clanton”\*

“Gen. M. J. Bulger (47<sup>th</sup>)”\*

“Wm. Cooper”

“F[rancis] L[eigh] Pettus”

“E[phraim] Kirby”

“J. C. C. Sanders”\*

“John T. Morgan”\*

“Dr. S. Ames”

“E. W. Pettus”\*

“Gen. H. D. Clayton”\*

“W. L. Yancey”\*

“Gov D. P. Lewis”\*∞

## 1904

“Gen. Tennent Lomax”\*

“Maj. Henry R. Shorter”\*

“Gov. Joseph F. Johnston”\*

“Col. John T. Milner”

“Tennent Lomax, Jr.”†

“Miss Zitella Cooke”

“Daniel Crawford, State Treasurer”\*

“Gov. Thomas H. Watts”\*

## 1905

“Photograph of the Legislature of 1903”

“Dr. Mortimer H. Jordan”\*

“Mr. Joel White”

“Jere Austill”

“Andrew Jackson”

“Gov. H. W. Collier and wife”

“Gov. Thomas H. Watts”\*

“Gov. L. E. Parsons”\*∞

“Gen. Josiah Gorgas”\*

“Gov. G. S. Houston”

## 1908

“Judge David B. Ligon”

“Joel Matthews”

“Gov. John A. Winston”\*

“Dr. Francis W. Sykes”

“Admiral Raphael Semmes”\*

“Col. John Crowell”

“Dr. Reuben Shorter and wife”

“Reuben Shorter, Jr., and wife”

“Mrs. Sophie Shorter Lomax, first wife of

Col. Tennent Lomax”†

## 1911

“General Jesse Winston Garth”

“General John Gregg”\*

“General M. J. Bulger”\*

1913

“Alexander B. Clitherall”\*

“Dr. Richard T. Brumby”

\* indicates Confederate civil or military service

† indicates States’ Rights or Confederate connection

∞ indicates Reconstruction officials

Sources: Minutes and Annual Reports, 1901 – 1913, Board of Trustees Minutes, Reports, and  
Correspondence, ADAH, Montgomery

Appendix 5. Thomas Owen's letter to John Inzer

June 27, 1910

My dear Col. Inzer:

I do wish to assure you of my high appreciation of your valued letter of the 20<sup>th</sup> inst. To one who loves the old Confederacy, its principles, and its memories, as keenly and loyally as I do, you need have made no apology for its tone. It is just such a letter of self revelation as would have been expected from one whose life has been so well spent, and who at an advanced age, looks back in calm retrospect on a multitude of dramatic and thrilling events.

You are not the only one who is unable to appreciate the untoward fate of the Confederacy. Thousands of good and loyal men and women have never appreciated the reason why, under the decree of Providence, the Confederacy did not win in the struggle for separate national existence, and in the still more vital contest for what was believed would have been a larger degree of true civic independence. And this impatient questioning does not mean that they do not, one and all, bow reverently in submission, or that they are wanting in respect and loyalty to the existing governmental order.

While there was an immediate shattering of hopes, and at the same time an immensity of loss, both of life and treasure, which it is appalling to contemplate, either comparatively or in any other way, to the philosophic mind, which doubts not that "one increasing purpose runs" through all of the doings of men, the struggle of the sixties must have a wide and a far-reaching significance. With God a thousand years is but as yesterday, and that we, with our short-sighted

vision, and with a life limited by three score and ten years, are unable to even catch a partial glimpse of His great designs and their workings, should not be a cause of any wonder. The truth is, the best that any of us can do, is to play his part in the most heroic way, consistent with his environment and his perception of the truth as it is given him to understand it. That our fathers did all this and more, and made for themselves a record more glorious and bright, than has ever been made, or can ever again be made by the generations of men, should be a compensating circumstance, even though the things they most hoped for were not realized. It is not a small thing to have a share, in the hands of the Almighty, in the shaping of the fate of the worlds, and civilization, and governments. Certain it is that our Republic, the United States of today, but for the leaven of fine influence of Confederate principles would be a mockery and a sham. Even with the saving favor of the multitude of good things which have gone into its warp and woof from the old South, and the organized principles of the government transmitted through the Confederate constitution and laws, which was but the crystallized expression of the thought and aspiration of our Revolutionary fathers, one almost despairs for the safety of the Republic. As for myself I am not pessimistic in the least, and yet I realize that oftentimes the Ship of State undergoes a thousand severe strainings, due to scores of foolish "Isms," and unsafe and visionary schemes.

I was born after the War, but I was reared in an atmosphere full of love for the Confederacy and its principles. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that I should have been found in the ranks of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans when it came to be organized to take up the work of the fathers, both by sharing it in their lifetime, and in order to make sure of its continuance when they should have passed away. On all occasions and everywhere I have striven to emphasize and enlarge upon our obligations to that portion of our past in all of its

phases, representated [sic] by the tragic years of the War of Secession. And I have the satisfaction of feeling that all of this labor and zeal has not been in vain. The Sons of the South can be relied upon to be true to the traditions and to the records of the fathers!

In my official capacity as the representative of the State of Alabama, in working out her part in the great struggle, and in assembling the details of her more than one hundred thousand men who participated therein, I have further show[n] my appreciation of the dignity and importance of that period of our history. Day by day, as I have gone on with the work, I have myself been strengthened, not only for its continuance, but also for my other many and exacting duties, by an acknowledgement and appreciation of the greatness and extent and magnitude of that struggle and of its heroic lessons. Oh, the tragedy, the pathos, the suffering, the heroism, the almost superhuman ongoing of it! I have read much of the great struggles between governments and between men from the beginnings of recorded history, but the struggle between the Confederacy and the Union is unequalled, unparalleled, and without precedent. Shall it be forgotten? Never! Not so long as the force of example shall animate men, both as a corrective and as a stimulus...

(The rest of the letter addresses Owen's preliminary plans for the Alabama regimental history series.)

Source: Thomas M. Owen to Col. John W. Inzer, June 27, 1910, Confederate Regimental History Files, 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, SG024908, ADAH, Montgomery.