

**‘My goal will ever be to make history popular’:  
Peter Brannon’s Quest for Alabama History**

by

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## Abstract

Peter Alexander Brannon (1882-1967) was a noteworthy figure in Alabama history during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Throughout his fifty-year career at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Brannon wrote extensively on Alabama's rich history, covering a vast array of topics relating to local history, place names, archaeology, folklore, travel and transportation, material culture, and geography. His weekly column in the *Montgomery Advertiser* spanned nineteen years and still cited today by professionals and amateurs alike. The columns were just one of the ways Brannon connected with the public in his quest to make history "popular." Brannon also lectured on, taught about, and advocated for Alabama history to anyone who would give him a hearing, all the while expanding his agency's outreach mission. Newspapers statewide documented his travels and upcoming lectures at various schools, civic organizations and local historical societies. His knowledge of Alabama history led one newspaper to nickname him a "colossus of knowledge."

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Finally, my grandmother, Mary Ann. Mame has been my biggest cheerleader from day one. Her contagious enthusiasm and home-cooked meals propelled me through many late nights.

The summers spent traveling through the U.S. visiting national landmarks and museums and her “test time” questions are amongst the fondest of my childhood memories. My inspiration, mentor, but most importantly a lifelong supporter of all my endeavors, I dedicate this work to her.

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## List of Abbreviations

ADAH Alabama Department of Archives and History

AAS Alabama Anthropological Society

AHQ *Alabama Historical Quarterly*

## Introduction

In 1932, soon after beginning his weekly “Through the Years” column in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, Peter Brannon wrote to his supervisor at the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) that his “stories” were “intended to be popular presentations of incidents in the life of the state.” He noted that his “ambition will ever be to make history popular and to forward the interest in this my chosen profession.” His goal was to make his writings “available to others.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter Alexander Brannon (1882-1967) was a noteworthy figure in Alabama history during the first half of the twentieth century. A pharmacist by training, Brannon began his second career at ADAH in 1911, devoting fifty-plus years to the institution, serving in various capacities including chief clerk (1911-1920), curator (1920-1925), acting director (1925-1926), military records archivist/curator (1926-1955), and finally director (1955-1967).<sup>2</sup> Throughout his tenure, Brannon wrote extensively on Alabama’s rich history and edited multiple statewide publications including *Arrow Points* and the *Alabama Historical Quarterly*. His weekly column in the *Montgomery Advertiser* spanned nineteen years and covered a vast array of topics relating to Alabama’s local history, place names, archaeology, folklore, travel and transportation, material culture and geography.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter A. Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files, 1837-2012 (hereby cited as ADAH Administrative Files).

<sup>2</sup> Peter A. Brannon, ed., *Handbook of the Alabama Anthropological Society* (Montgomery, AL: Brown Printing, 1920), 29.



These columns, still cited today by professionals and amateurs alike, were just one of the ways Brannon connected with the public in his quest to make history “popular” and to expand ADAH’s mission of outreach. Brannon not only wrote about Alabama history, but also lectured on, taught about, and advocated for the subject. His yearly reports are filled with accounts of trekking across the state to give talks or assisting local citizens looking to establish a county historical society. In one year alone, he reportedly gave 102 talks with no two the same.<sup>3</sup> Newspapers statewide documented his travels noting his visits and upcoming lectures at various schools, civic organizations and local historical societies. Brannon’s knowledge of the state’s history led one newspaper to nickname him a “colossus of knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> As curator, he acquired numerous artifact collections, including the extensive archaeological collection that was compiled by members of the Alabama Anthropological Society (AAS). He was highly regarded nationally amongst his peers and brought attention to the work being done in the state. Not bad for a pharmacist turned historian.

In 1933, Albert B. Moore (1887-1967), a history professor and Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Alabama, penned a letter to his colleague James Saxon Childers, an English professor at Birmingham Southern College, regarding the work being done by Peter Brannon. He wrote, Brannon “has the spirit of Erasmus and works unremittingly through sheer love of work, which is becoming to [anyone] who makes pretense of scholarship. Mr. Brannon’s achievements, I have often thought, should inspire the student to select a special field and work

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<sup>3</sup> Unknown author, “Brannon’s Speeches,” *Alabama Journal*, March 2, 1951, Surname Files, ADAH (hereby cited as Surname Files).

<sup>4</sup> Lillian DeLoach, “Keeper of State Archives Well Qualified For His Job,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 2, 1956.

indefatigably in it so as to avoid the sin of superficiality.”<sup>5</sup> One newspaper columnist used Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem *The Brook* as an analogy to Brannon’s long tenure at ADAH.<sup>6</sup> A friend wrote that Brannon was “an arsenal of historic facts and an appreciator of all that has made the past memorable.” “When Peter was born,” the author concluded, “a volume of Dickens might have been left open and Peter hopped out.”<sup>7</sup> “Of details he is a master,” wrote one newspaper upon the announcement of his promotion to director.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most informative summary of Brannon’s career came from his alma mater, Auburn University, when it presented him with an Honorary Doctor of Laws in 1965: Brannon’s “authoritative learning over the years has been unstintingly available and an inspiration to laymen, students, research scholars and authors in all fields of learning.”<sup>9</sup> Brannon strove to learn and was willing to share with whomever was curious to know.

His travels brought him into contact with a host of individuals from all social and economic backgrounds. Brannon relied on African American tenant farmers in central Alabama for leads pertaining to Indian mound locations and caches of potsherds and beads discovered as the farmers plowed the fields. He mingled with the white upper class in many of the civic and genealogical societies of which he was a member. These interactions were key to his

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<sup>5</sup> Albert B. Moore to James Saxon Childers, September 27, 1933, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253). Moore had recently completed his sweeping three-volume state history that would later be republished and became the standard history of Alabama for many years. Albert B. Moore, *History of Alabama and Its People* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1927); Milo B. Howard Jr., “Histories of Alabama,” *Alabama Review* 22, no. 4 (October 1969): 252-253.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Birt, “He Goes On and On . . .,” *Montgomery Examiner*, September 10, 1954, Surname Files.

<sup>7</sup> Clifford A. Richmond, “My Friend,” *Richmond’s Scratch Pad* 1, no. 5 (undated): 5. The clipping can be found in the Surname Files.

<sup>8</sup> Unknown author, “Peter A. Brannon Carries On,” *Alabama Journal*, March 1, 1955, Surname Files.

<sup>9</sup> The honorary doctorate was awarded June 3, 1965. The Alabama Legislature passed a resolution honoring Brannon’s achievement following his death in 1967.

development as a historian, his understanding of the state's history, and often inspirational for future stories.

Except for a few half-page biographies, little has been written on Brannon's career or his contributions to our understanding of Alabama history.<sup>10</sup> Scholars evaluating ADAH's early history have focused much of their attention on its founder, Thomas McAdory Owen, and his wife and second director, Marie Bankhead Owen, a member of the prominent Bankhead family and the reason for the building of the department's permanent home across from the State Capital. With one being a leader in the development of the archival profession in the United States and the other being the state's first female agency head and critic of women's suffrage, it is not hard to see why attention has fallen where it has.<sup>11</sup> Another reason for this, perhaps, is that most Alabama historians know Brannon as ADAH director (1955-1967) and therefore see him as an administrator. Few realize that he spent the previous four decades traveling the state,

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen, ed., "Brannon, Peter Alexander," vol. 3, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1921), 207; Walter B. Jones, "Peter A. Brannon," *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 11, 1927; Donald C. Rice, "Biographical Sketches of Presidents of the Alabama Historical Association: Part I, First Through Twelfth Presidents, 1947-1960," *Alabama Review* 50, no. 1 (January 1997): 39-40; Pintlala Historical Association, "Peter Alexander Brannon," *Pintlala Historical Association* 26, no. 3 (October 2012): 3; Alabama Library Association, "Brannon, Peter Alexander, 1882-1967," *Alabama Authors*, accessed April 17, 2018, [https://www.lib.ua.edu/Alabama\\_Authors/?p=826](https://www.lib.ua.edu/Alabama_Authors/?p=826); William Stanley Hoole, *Alabama Bibliography: A Short-Title Catalogue of Peter Alexander Brannon, Former Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Confederate Publishing Co., 1984), 5-6. ADAH's Surname Files feature several short newspaper biographies. The only exception to the half-page format is a paper presented shortly after Brannon's death by John Ward to members of The Thirteen, a literary and social group comprised of thirteen prominent Montgomery men, of which Brannon was a member. See John M. Ward, "Our Friend and President – Peter Alexander Brannon," *The Thirteen Records*, 1906-2010, ADAH.

<sup>11</sup> Wendell H. Stephenson, "Some Pioneer Alabama Historians III: Thomas McAdory Owen," *Alabama Review* 2, no. 1 (January 1949): 45-62; James F. Doster, "Thomas McAdory Owen Sr.," in *Keepers of the Past*, ed. Clifford L. Lord (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 97-108; Milo B. Howard Jr., "Thomas McAdory Owen: Alabama's Greatest Bibliographer," *Alabama Review* 28, no. 1 (January 1975): 3-15; Alden Monroe, "Thomas Owen and the Founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Provenance* 21, no. 1 (January 2003): 22-35; Robert J. Jakeman, "Marie Bankhead Owen and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1920-1955," *Provenance* 21, no. 1 (January 2003): 36-65; Rebecca Lapczynski Hebert, "Marie Bankhead Owen," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://www.encyclodiaofalabama.org/article/h-1188>; Patrick L. Tomlin, "The Archival Unconscious: Thomas Owen and the Founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008).

collecting archival material and artifact collections, conducting archaeological surveys, indexing the state's military records, writing extensively on Alabama history, and performing various forms of outreach and extension services for ADAH.

The most important scholarly attention Brannon has received was a published catalog of his writings by William Stanley Hoole, the noted University of Alabama librarian, in 1984.<sup>12</sup> Totalling over twenty pages, the sheer volume and array of subjects covered by Brannon offer a possible explanation into the difficulty of examining Brannon's career solely through his writings. Writing primarily for a public audience and telling popular history, Brannon too lacked the formal education and the argumentative nature in his writings that is necessary for criticism by today's scholars.<sup>13</sup>

A biography of this kind is rare. Much has been written on museum and archival collecting, yet stories looking at the individuals who did the collecting are less common. The only comparisons this author has found are two theses pertaining to Dr. Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton (1878–1961), a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the founder of the Southern Historical Collection.<sup>14</sup> John David Smith's article on U.B. Phillips' travels through Georgia and other southern states collecting plantation records is another example.<sup>15</sup> Yet, these pertain solely to the archival side of collecting, not the museum

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<sup>12</sup> William Stanley Hoole, *Alabama Bibliography: A Short-Title Catalogue of Peter Alexander Brannon, Former Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Confederate Publishing Co., 1984).

<sup>13</sup> There are exceptions, particularly within the archaeological field. These will be discussed in the following pages.

<sup>14</sup> Stephanie Adams, "The accidental archivist: J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton and the Creation of the Southern Historical Collection" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010); Matisha H. Wiggs, "Ransacking the South: J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton and the Founding of the Southern Historical Collection" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> John David Smith, "The Historian as Archival Advocate: Ulrich Bonnell Phillips and the Records of Georgia and the South," *American Archivist* 52, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 320-331.

portion—a distinction becoming more relevant during this period. Much has been written on individuals who produced local history, but little on those who wrote particularly on Alabama.

In this thesis, I will focus on Brannon’s travels, lectures, and writings to demonstrate how all of his activities linked together. They reveal how he developed as a historian, yet also his focus on his ultimate goal: “to make history popular.”<sup>16</sup> In this respect, the following chapters will give an overview of Brannon’s career followed by discussions relating to Brannon’s intake of knowledge, i.e. assimilation, and his methods of sharing the learned, i.e. dissemination.

The primary sources used in this study are Brannon’s collection of writings, his travel reports, and personal papers. In addition, various ADAH records including, Board of Trustees minutes, administrative (director’s) files as well as the Alabama Anthropological Society (AAS) collection were consulted in order to gain a better overall sense of ADAH’s development and Brannon’s involvement within the department. Through Brannon’s travel reports, we can learn a great deal about Brannon’s emergence into the historical field and how he acquired the knowledge he did that would help shape his future contributions to Alabama history. The travel reports date from 1911 to 1932 with the majority dated between 1916 and 1923. They are generally a few pages in length and were written for the director at the time whether it be Tom or Marie Owen. Oftentimes they detail his purpose, travel companions, finds, opinions, interviewees, location details, updates on local historical societies, and information on what could be done to mark historically significant locations. The locations range from central Alabama to the southern counties of Clarke, Mobile, Washington and Baldwin.<sup>17</sup> Brannon’s

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<sup>16</sup> Brannon was often classified as a historian, archaeologist, anthropologist, or a naturalist.

<sup>17</sup> Travel restraints, perhaps, could explain the lack of visits to north Alabama. The reports are scattered throughout two collections: ADAH Administrative Files and ADAH staff field reports on collecting materials and surveying sites, 1911-1955.

initial success was noted by Tom Owen when he commented on a 1915 report to the Board of Trustees that the “trip was altogether profitable and comparatively inexpensive” and that “[i]f more excursions [sic] could be made the department would be infinitely richer.”<sup>18</sup> Traveling the state early in his career provided learning opportunities as well as chances to make lasting contacts that were instrumental to his development as a professional historian and public educator. Those years spent on the road were vital to Brannon learning new things or physically being in the presence of history he had only read about. Without the formidable years, it would be hard to imagine Brannon being able to maintain his rigorous, all-encompassing writing regime and the relentless reference correspondence he maintained for so many years.

Brannon’s work and career also emerged during a new era of studying the past. The professionalization of archaeology (and the means of excavations before standards were established) tied in with a surge in national interest of America’s first inhabitants that developed during the late nineteenth century can also be evaluated by examining Brannon’s reports. Lastly, Brannon’s reports provide a glimpse into ADAH’s initial missions and growth, its initial museum collecting and displays, the and various agency outreach projects.

His writings on early Alabama travelers and accounts, steamboats, manners and customs, Southeastern Indian trade goods, and a host of other topics, appeared in a variety of journals, periodicals and newspapers. One editorial wrote that Brannon covered “everything from archaeology to the subtleties of the human mind and the romances to be found in man’s battles and loves and strivings.”<sup>19</sup> Evaluating Brannon’s effectiveness in making Alabama history

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<sup>18</sup> “Trip of P. A. Brannon,” 1914-1915 Annual Report, ADAH Board of Trustees minutes, reports, and correspondence, 1901-2006 (hereby cited as ADAH Board of Trustees Files unless specified otherwise); To read the full report, see “Report of P. A. Brannon, Chief Clerk, on work done in Russell County, Alabama, and Muskogee and Chattahoochee Counties, Georgia, in the interest of the Department, April 12<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 1915, inclusive,” ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>19</sup> Unknown author, “Peter Brannon Honored,” *Alabama Journal*, April 19, 1949, Surname Files.

“popular,” and his writings’ place in Alabama historiography can offer a glimpse into the attractiveness of historical writing during the first half of the twentieth century. His columns also serve as a lens into local history and its production; his correspondence files are filled with follow up letters from everyday readers looking for additional information. Brannon’s transition from pharmacist to a non-traditional professional historian allows us to examine his career as an exception to the typical university-trained historian—and later archivist—that were typically placed in charge of state and national historical organizations such as ADAH.

## Chapter 1: Assimilation

Peter A. Brannon was born on August 30, 1882, in Seale, Russell County, Alabama to George Thomas Brannon, a farmer, and Martha Stephen Green Brannon.<sup>1</sup> He developed an interest in history at an early age, due primarily to the influence of his step-grandfather Peter A. Greene. Greene worked as clerk for the Circuit Court of Russell County and was an avid collector of Civil War and Native American artifacts. Brannon told friends that when he was seven years old he vividly remembered going with Greene, who had served in the 31<sup>st</sup> Georgia Infantry during the Civil War, to a memorial service for Jefferson Davis held in Seale the day after the Confederate president's death. Following the service, the two went "hunting for Indian relics."<sup>2</sup> It was from this point that Brannon began studying his surroundings and collecting a variety of material including bottles and material relating to Alabama's first inhabitants. After graduating from Seale High School in 1898, Brannon enrolled at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) where he received a degree in pharmacy in 1900.<sup>3</sup> Brannon found employment as a pharmacist in Talladega, Alabama, then Columbus, Georgia, and later, Troy, Alabama, all the while continuing to pursue his true passions: local history and relic collecting.

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<sup>1</sup> Unknown author, "Capitol Profile," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 1, 1959, Surname Files.

<sup>2</sup> Peter A. Brannon, "Peter A. Greene Collection of Archaeological Objects," *Arrow Points* 3, no. 2 (1921): 77; Brannon, "Traveling on Trains Today Far Different Than In 1880's," *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 9, 1950; Ward, "Our Friend and President – Peter Alexander Brannon," 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> State of Alabama Personnel Department Questionnaire, ADAH Administrative Files.



Brannon inherited Greene's collection following his death in 1903. The collection consisted of "a number of manuscripts, a great many Indian relics, a number of pistols, swords, guns and other miscellaneous things."<sup>4</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen had heard of the collection and was interested in procuring several items for the newly established ADAH in Montgomery. Owen, who founded ADAH in 1901, traveled to Columbus to visit Brannon, view the collection and to make notes of the local history. In 1904 Owen purchased several pieces from the Greene collection. They continued to communicate "spasmodically" concerning "collectors and locations of collections." As a result, Brannon's "interest in the work of the Department of Archives and History from these small beginnings grew to a serious nature." This "serious nature" must refer to Brannon's move to Montgomery in 1907. Working as a pharmacist at Spann's Drug Store, Brannon began to assist Owen in "various programs" and their "relationship as research associates" grew stronger.<sup>5</sup>

In Owen's 1909-1910 annual report to the Board of Trustees he urged the members to consider appropriating funds to establish the position of chief clerk. The job had several duties such as serving as acting director while Owen was traveling the state "popularizing the Department." The candidate was also to travel throughout the state "securing for the State the thousands of precious historical relics, and aboriginal, pioneer, Confederate, personal, etc., etc., now going to waste, or else being carried away from us by enterprising collectors from other states."<sup>6</sup> Owen further elaborated that the chief clerk would also serve as the head of the yet to be

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<sup>4</sup> Peter A. Brannon, *Vilula and Something of the Brannons from There: A Story of an East Alabama Village and Surroundings by one of the descendants* (Montgomery, AL: Walker Printing, 1966), dedication page; Peter A. Brannon, "The Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1962): 7.

<sup>5</sup> Brannon, "The Alabama Department of Archives and History," 1-15.

<sup>6</sup> 1909-1910 Annual Report, ADAH Board of Trustees Files.

created anthropological division of the ADAH. He ended by stressing that the job would go beyond academic work and that it would include field work relating to archaeological investigations.<sup>7</sup> It is clear from Owen's report that Brannon was whom he had in mind for the position when he referenced Brannon's archaeological interest and his niche for collecting. The Board of Trustees approved the appropriation of funding and Brannon began his new career in February 1911.<sup>8</sup>

### **Alabama Department of Archives and History**

The impulse to collect history "came late" to the South.<sup>9</sup> Northern states had already developed serious historical societies that preserved important records and artifacts. Those same states also had universities that lead the way in training the nation's first professional historians. Yet Alabama was able to accomplish something that others had not. ADAH was the first independent state-funded archival agency in the United States, preceding the National Archives by thirty years. The Alabama Plan—as its development and organization become known—served as a model for other institutions across the South.<sup>10</sup> This period of American history was marked by states taking control of their history and its production. It was by no means happenstance that ADAH's establishment coincided with the creation of Alabama's 1901

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. The anthropological division was never created.

<sup>8</sup> 1910-1911 Annual Report, ADAH Board of Trustees Files; Brannon, "The Alabama Department of Archives and History," 7.

<sup>9</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 107; Robert R. Simpson, "The Origin of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 155.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell B. Garrett, "The Preservation of Alabama History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 5, no. 1 (January 1928): 3; Simpson, 155-170; Keith S. Hebert, "Thomas M. Owen: The Founder," (presentation given at Cultural Crossroads, Montgomery, AL, February 10, 2018).

Constitution—a document meant to repress African American progress made during the Reconstruction era. In other words, the creation of a state archives was another means to control a select group’s history and memory. This aspect is important to remember, yet beyond the scope of this project.<sup>11</sup>



ADAH Staff in the State Capitol, 1915. Brannon is #5 seated, facing right; Owen is #1 center, standing. (ADAH)

ADAH’s founder, Thomas McAdory Owen, was a native of Jonesboro, Jefferson County, and a graduate of the University of Alabama law school. Soon after receiving his law degree Owen met his wife Marie Bankhead. The Bankhead family was one of Alabama’s most powerful families. Her father, John H. Bankhead, was a U.S. Congressman and her two brothers, John

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the topic see “Archiving White Memory” in Brundage, 105-137.

Hollis II and William B., followed in their father's footsteps serving in the U.S. Senate and as Speaker of the House for the U.S. House of Representatives, respectively.<sup>12</sup> Through these family connections, Owen was appointed in 1894 as chief clerk with the U.S. Post Office Inspectors office in Washington, D.C.<sup>13</sup> Owen was an avid collector of Alabama-related material and during his tenure in Washington, D.C., he befriended Library of Congress staff who introduced him to the newly-created field of scientific history.<sup>14</sup> He corresponded with other collectors across the United States and grew increasingly concerned about the future preservation of Alabama records. As interest grew in the study and preservation of the South, Owen and other like-minded individuals founded the Southern History Association in 1896.

Circumstances brought Tom and Marie Owen back to Alabama in 1897. The story goes that Owen envisioned ADAH and its potential after a visit to the Alabama State Capitol where he was appalled to see a book of telegrams sent by Governor Andrew B. Moore (1857-1861) in 1861 being used a doorstep.<sup>15</sup> Unsuccessful in his first attempt to have legislation passed to protect Alabama's records, Owen saw the dormant Alabama Historical Society, and its influential members, as the means to obtain the necessary legislation.<sup>16</sup> As a result of Owen's efforts, the Alabama History Commission was established in 1899 to "to make a full, detailed and exhaustive examination of all the sources . . . of the history of Alabama from the earliest

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<sup>12</sup> Angela Jill Cooley, "John Hollis Bankhead II," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1424>; G. Wayne Dowdy, "William B. Bankhead," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1366>.

<sup>13</sup> Monroe, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Simpson, 156.

<sup>15</sup> R.D.W. Connor, "Dedication of the Archival Section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building," *American Archivist* 4, no. 2 (April 1941): 78-79, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40288236>.

<sup>16</sup> Monroe, 25.

times, whether in domestic or foreign archives or repositories, or in private hands, including the records of Alabama troops in all wars . . . and also of the location and present condition of battlefields, historic houses and buildings and other places.”<sup>17</sup> In 1901, the commission published their impressive findings as the first volume of *Publications of the Alabama Historical Society*. That same year ADAH was established and within a short amount of time, Owen had “raked Alabama with a fine-toothed comb.”<sup>18</sup> From the organization’s creation in 1901 until 1940, ADAH was housed in the State Capitol in Montgomery. Through New Deal legislation and the powerful Bankhead name, funding was secured to build a permanent home. The Alabama World War Memorial Building (in which ADAH was housed) opened on Veterans Day 1940.<sup>19</sup> Owen had helped shift the preservation of history from private to public. And Peter Brannon became one of his most important tools in reshaping public history in Alabama.

Brannon’s unique interests and personality meshed well with his new job at ADAH. From 1911 until the 1930s Brannon traveled the state (and Georgia) representing ADAH in various capacities. One of Brannon’s key objectives on these trips was to locate Indian town sites and mounds to excavate. Another purpose was to survey county records and note individuals who held family papers and records of value to ADAH. The majority of his travels were situated in the central and southern portions of the state. The lasting contacts Brannon made on these trips provided him with details about state and local history. Brannon documented his activities in travel reports addressed to either Tom or Marie Owen, depending on who was the director at the

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<sup>17</sup> “Act Creating the Alabama History Commission” in *Report of the Alabama History Commission to the Governor of Alabama, December 1, 1900*, ed. Thomas McAdory Owen (Montgomery, AL: Brown Printing, 1901).

<sup>18</sup> Herbert H. Smith quoting Dr. Eugene A. Smith in Herbert H. Smith to Eugene A. Smith, January 19, 1914, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16711), “Bartram Natural History” folder.

<sup>19</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen, “Dedication Hall of Flags Alabama World War Memorial Building June 14, 1940,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1940): 108-123; Connor, 77-83.

time. The reports are filled with Brannon's attempts to locate Indian town sites and his thoughts on the practice of archaeology. Owen and Brannon placed heavy emphasis on collecting Civil War and Native Indian artifacts as well as natural history specimens, and this emphasis is evident in Brannon's reports. Brannon's efforts to organize local historical societies and other outreach services performed by ADAH at various locations are also apparent. We also gain insight into the various organizations Brannon helped to create, particularly the Bartram Natural History Society and the Alabama Anthropological Society.

### **Alabama Anthropological Society**

Other fields of preservation were gaining traction at the turn of the century. Museums were transitioning from private cabinet of curiosities to institutions geared for research and organized theme-driven exhibits aimed at educating the public. These new museums placed heavy emphasis on natural history and anthropology.<sup>20</sup> Alabama was no different. Brannon and Owen's shared interest in Alabama's natural history and Native Indian history became the driving force that brought Brannon to Montgomery, and eventually, his reasoning for abandoning his given pharmacy profession for his true passion. Brannon's emergence into the field began with his involvement with the Alabama Anthropological Society (AAS).

Founded in 1909, AAS was the brainchild of Owen and Brannon along with ADAH employee and Choctaw linguist, Henry S. Halbert.<sup>21</sup> Owen served as its first president and Brannon was elected secretary prior to his hiring at ADAH.<sup>22</sup> AAS was closely-linked with the

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 3-8; David Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 2 (April 1994): 244.

<sup>21</sup> Halbert co-authored one of the first accounts of the Creek Indian War of 1813-1814. See H.S. Halbert and T.H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895).

<sup>22</sup> Brannon, "25 Years of the A.A.S.," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 16, 1936.

“scholarly and educational aims” of ADAH.<sup>23</sup> The group’s work was aimed at documenting the state’s Indian town sites and mounds, collecting artifacts from said sites as well as to educate the general public. With the field of anthropology being a new discipline at the turn of the century, AAS was allegedly the first of its kind established in the South.<sup>24</sup>

Owen and Brannon often wrote to northern universities and the Smithsonian’s U.S. Bureau of Ethnology asking for secondary literature. The responses were oftentimes informative, yet brief due to the lack of information and the professional newness of the field.<sup>25</sup> Fortunately, work had begun in Alabama in the late nineteenth century to document sites around the state. In the 1890s the Alabama Historical Society, of which Owen was a member, began to identify all Indian mounds and town sites in the state.<sup>26</sup> Owen and other members of the Society had at their disposal two of the earliest, yet limited, published sources on sites: Albert J. Pickett’s 1851 state history and Cyrus Thomas’ 1891 report of Indians mounds east of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>27</sup> The Alabama History Commission, during their work to document Alabama records for the state legislature in 1899, expanded upon Thomas’ collection to include trading paths as well as Creek, Cherokee, and Choctaw town sites.<sup>28</sup> In 1910, the AAS further increased the list of sites and

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory A. Waselkov, “A History of the Alabama Anthropological Society,” *Southeastern Archaeology* 13, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 64.

<sup>24</sup> Unknown author, “First in the South, Alabama Anthropological Society Perfected,” *The Tennessean*, May 31, 1909.

<sup>25</sup> See Alabama Anthropological Society Records, 1787-1979 (LPR151), Box 1, folders 1-3.

<sup>26</sup> Peter A. Brannon, “The Alabama Anthropological Society,” *American Anthropologist* 23, no. 4 (October-December 1921): 489-492, accessed October 22, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/660677>.

<sup>27</sup> Albert J. Pickett, *History of Alabama and incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the earliest period* (Charleston, SC: Walker and James, 1851).

<sup>28</sup> See “Aboriginal and Indian Remains in Alabama” in *Report of the Alabama History Commission to the Governor of Alabama, December 1, 1900*. Vol. I, ed. Thomas McAdory Owen (Montgomery, AL: Brown Printing, 1901), 357-431.

included collectors and their collections.<sup>29</sup> Most of the sites visited were in Montgomery County and Elmore County, areas that “could be reached by foot, buggy, and/or train.”<sup>30</sup> The number of recorded sites in Montgomery alone expanded from seven to twenty-eight within the nine-year span. In addition to expanding the list of identified sites and mounds, AAS began to excavate said sites.



Members of the Alabama Anthropological Society at Fort Mitchell, 1918. Brannon is on the far-left kneeling. (ADAH)

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas M. Owen, ed., *Handbook of the Alabama Anthropological Society, 1910* (Montgomery, AL: Brown Printing, 1910), 36.

<sup>30</sup> Craig T. Sheldon Jr., “Alabama Anthropological Society Field Activities,” in *Cataloguing and Documenting the Historic Creek Archaeological Collections of the Alabama Department of Archives and History* by Gregory A. Waselkov and Craig T. Sheldon Jr. (National Science Foundation, 1987), 33.



Members were from the upper and upper-middle echelons of society. By day they were businessmen, insurance brokers, bankers and medical professionals.<sup>31</sup> Membership was three-tiered: Active members served as the governing body and were required to be Montgomery residents; Associates were allowed to participate in group activities; and Honorary members were individuals “distinguished in historical, literary or scientific attainments.”<sup>32</sup> Members had the opportunity to participate in either the Publicity, Field Exploration, Promotion, Transportation, or Collections committees. Typically, the group met once a month at a member’s home where a paper was read about recent fieldwork or new research. An annual excursion was organized oftentimes including the members’ wives and children. The bulk of the archaeological work, however, was conducted by small groups and performed in the winter months when the soil was easier to dig.<sup>33</sup> Brannon and other members conducted research that is still consulted today. Herbert B. Battle’s paper on the Southeastern Indian’s use of oils is one example. J.Y. Brame’s research on DeSoto’s route through Alabama was integral to the Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology’s John R. Swanton’s 1930 work with the U.S. DeSoto Expedition Commission.<sup>34</sup>

Following Owen’s untimely death in 1920, Brannon was appointed AAS’ second president. The focus of both men on Alabamians earliest inhabitants and the state’s natural

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<sup>31</sup> Peter A. Brannon, ed., *Handbook of the Alabama Anthropological Society 1920* (Montgomery, AL: Brown Printing, 1920), 26-37. Dr. Herbert B. Battle (chemist) and James Yancey Brame Jr. (insurance broker) and Dr. Paul S. Mertins, a Harvard-graduate ophthalmologist, were amongst the ranks.

<sup>32</sup> Brannon, ed., *Handbook of the Alabama Anthropological Society 1920*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Sheldon, “Alabama Anthropological Society Field Activities,” 35.

<sup>34</sup> Herbert B. Battle, “The Domestic Use of Oil among the Southern Aborigines,” *American Anthropologist* 24, no. 2 (April-June 1922): 171-182; Vernon James Knight Jr., “Seeking Methods That Work,” in *The Search for Mabila: The Decisive Battle Between Hernando de Soto and Chief Tascalusa*, ed. Vernon James Knight Jr. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 139-149.

history were of utmost importance to ADAH's mission. Owen and Brannon's roles in the organization and their work with the like-minded men of the AAS assured that many of the personal collections of AAS members were ultimately donated to ADAH.<sup>35</sup> In addition to donations, Brannon noted in numerous reports that he purchased aboriginal artifacts. Through his own efforts, as well as his efforts to persuade AAS members to donate their personal collections, today ADAH's archaeological collection is considered the "largest assemblage of artifacts available for the study of Creek cultural change" in the world.<sup>36</sup>

Brannon's knowledge of archaeological sites, connections and correspondence with national experts and his writings made him one of the de facto archaeological experts in the state. In fact, Alabama's state-funded universities lacked the necessary professional archaeologists or programs of study, leaving him virtually the only person in the state suitable to represent Alabama on the National Research Council's Committee on State Archaeological Surveys. He was appointed to the committee in 1924 and served until its dissolution in 1937.<sup>37</sup> The Committee was created in order to aid various nonprofessionals and state organizations working to document their Native American history, and to standardize the process of archaeological surveying across the United States. Standardization was necessary due to the wide-ranging techniques and "cavalier manner" in which many of the antiquarian organizations, like AAS,

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<sup>35</sup> 1920-1921 Director's Report to ADAH Board of Trustees Files (SG7369), folder 3, 18.

<sup>36</sup> In 1987, ADAH was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation to organize the collections by developing, proper storage, reestablishing lost provenance, assigning conservation priorities, and other necessary steps. See Gregory A. Waselkov, ed., *Cataloguing and Documenting the Historic Creek Archaeological Collections of the Alabama Department of Archives and History* (National Science Foundation, 1987), ii.

<sup>37</sup> By the 1930s, the University of Alabama had an established department.

conducted surveys.<sup>38</sup> The committee likened the destruction of mounds without using proper techniques to “tearing pages out of a valuable book, a book which can never be re-written.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Bartram Natural History Society**

Brannon was also instrumental in the establishment of the Bartram Natural History Society. Established in 1914, the society’s purpose was to promote the “interest in the study of natural history in the State of Alabama, to bring together students for conference and discussion, to make collections of specimens, and to publish the results of research.”<sup>40</sup> Similar to the work done by AAS, the group was to benefit the promotion of ADAH and to collect natural history specimens. Displays were set up in the Capitol that exhibited recreated wildlife scenes and other displays of the AAS collections. The name was almost certainly the brainchild of Brannon due to his devotion to the naturalist William Bartram’s writings detailing his travels through Alabama and the state’s botany and Native American population. Renowned Bartram scholars, Roland M. Harper (1878-1966), botanist for the Geological Survey of Alabama, and Francis Harper (1886-1972), author of the seminal work of Bartram’s natural survey, both relied on Brannon’s research for their publications.<sup>41</sup> Much of Brannon’s research on Bartram’s travels within the state was later used by the Bartram Trail Conference to promote interest in and provide access to his

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<sup>38</sup> John A. Walthall, *Prehistoric Indians of the Southeast: Archaeology of Alabama and the Middle South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 172.

<sup>39</sup> National Research Council, “Guide Leaflet for Amateur Archaeologists,” (Washington, D.C.: 1930) republished in Michael J. O’Brien and R. Lee Lyman, “Gentle Persuasion: The National Research Council and Southeastern Archaeology,” *Journal of Alabama Archaeology* 46, no. 1 (June 2000): 1-42.

<sup>40</sup> Bylaws of the Bartram Natural History Society, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16711).

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Findley Shores, *On Harper’s Trail: Roland McMillan Harper, Pioneering Botanist of the Southern Coastal Plain* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 115-117; Francis Harper, ed., *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist Edition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958).

route.<sup>42</sup> Brannon published often in *The Auk* concerning bird sightings in and around Montgomery County. In 1916 Brannon organized the Montgomery Bird Lovers' Association to build bird houses across the city.<sup>43</sup> A year later he asked locals to take a census (many done by schoolchildren) pertaining to local the bird population. He had over two hundred responses.

### **Antiquities Act of 1915**

AAS was the most active organization digging in Alabama, but they were not the first nor the only ones interested in Alabama's prehistoric past. National interest in the mounds brought several notable outsiders to Alabama. Clarence B. Moore, an amateur archaeologist working for the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, began conducting archaeological surveys along the Alabama River, particularly at Moundville, one of the largest and most important Mississippian sites in the United States.<sup>44</sup> Moore's trips—beginning in 1899 and lasting into the 1910s—drew national attention especially when the objects he recovered were on display in museums outside the state.<sup>45</sup> Frustrated with Moore and the “reckless digging” conducted by other amateurs, Owen along with Brannon and others ushered into law the Alabama Antiquities Act of 1915.<sup>46</sup> According to the act, the State had “exclusive right” to all “aboriginal and other antiquities, mounds, earthworks, ancient forts and graves” within its boundaries.<sup>47</sup> The law said

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<sup>42</sup> Bartram Trail Conference, “Trip to Mobile, 1775,” accessed March 17, 2018, <http://bartramtrail.org/widget/page-1710334>.

<sup>43</sup> Unknown author, “Bird Lovers Plan to Form,” *Montgomery Times*, June 6, 1916; Unknown author, “Association to Protect Bird Life,” *Crenshaw County Times*, June 22, 1916; Unknown author, “Bird Census Reports Are Coming In,” *Montgomery Times*, March 3, 1917.

<sup>44</sup> Waselkov, “A History of the Alabama Anthropological Society,” 64.

<sup>45</sup> John A. Walthall, Vernon J. Knight Jr., and Gregory Waselkov, “Alabama Archaeology in the Twentieth Century,” in *Histories of Southeastern Archaeology*, ed. Shannon Tushingham, Jane Hill, and Charles H. McNutt (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 199-200.

<sup>46</sup> 1914-1915 Annual Report, ADAH Board of Trustees Files.

<sup>47</sup> Preservation of Antiquities in the State of Alabama Statute No. 669 of the 1915 laws.

that it was unlawful for anyone from outside the state to dig without permission, and that “no objects taken from such remains shall be sold or disposed of out of the State.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, ADAH, specifically Owen, was given the “vested authority” to grant the necessary permits to excavate.<sup>49</sup> It is no wonder then that the majority of Brannon’s reports were archaeologically-centered: Owen wanted him out in the field to secure and document those locations before others came and excavated. Through the Antiquities Act, and the heavy emphasis on natural history and anthropological research, Brannon was able to learn on the go and opportunities were afforded to him that may not have been available if not for the Antiquities Act.

### **Travel Reports: Burial Urns**

The majority of Brannon’s travel reports pertain to archaeological explorations and excavations in central Alabama, especially those predating Owen’s death in 1920. The “Urn-Burial” culture—so named by Brannon—was a unique “cultural complex of burial practices and ceramic forms and designs” that was prevalent amongst sites along the Alabama River.<sup>50</sup>

Archaeologists and historians believe that the arrival of European explorers in the sixteenth century and the diseases they brought with them caused the decline of the Mississippian people. Although much of the culture remained, “life became much simpler” when mound-building, extensive trading, and chiefdoms were dissolved.<sup>51</sup> Unique to central and southern parts of the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Vernon James Knight Jr., ed., *The Moundville Expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 14.

<sup>50</sup> Peter A. Brannon, “Urn-Burial in Central Alabama,” *American Antiquity* 3, no. 3 (January 1938): 228-235; Craig Turner Sheldon Jr., “The Mississippian-Historic Transition in Central Alabama (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1974), 15. Archaeologists today have noted the importance of Brannon and the AAS’s excavations.

<sup>51</sup> “Rebuilding” text panel in the *First Alabamians* exhibit at ADAH. The practice of using burial urns was most often found in the Protohistoric Period (1540-1700)—situated between the Prehistoric and Historic Periods.

state, the natives believed that the soul leaves the body after death. After some period of time and allowance for the soul to transport, the remains were buried. The urns themselves were merely cooking vessels with a larger one serving as the base, and a smaller sized one serving as the lid.

A large portion of the reports focus on the Pintlala Creek cemetery, a Protohistoric period site located in Lowndes County that covered roughly ten acres in size.<sup>52</sup> Brannon began visiting the Pintlala site in 1909 after reports of burial urns “falling into the river from the sides of an eroded bank.”<sup>53</sup> “The soil erosion between 1909 and 1925,” Brannon wrote, “was so severe that practically the entire surface soil was washed away.”<sup>54</sup> The Pintlala site remained a topic of focus for Brannon throughout his career and a decent portion of his writings were based on these reports and the work he did with AAS.<sup>55</sup> Other locations frequently visited during this time include Taskigi (Elmore County), Durant’s Bend (Dallas County) and Huith-le-walli/Cowles Bend (located on the Tallapoosa River). The travel reports describe the burials, the European trade items associated with the sites, and his conclusions.<sup>56</sup>

The methods employed by AAS members were problematic. More often than not, interest in collecting the items buried with the individuals trumped the scientific method of examining

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<sup>52</sup> Caleb Curren, *The Protohistoric Period in Central Alabama* (Camden: Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission, 1984), 29.

<sup>53</sup> Brannon, “Urn-Burial in Central Alabama,” 229.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on the exploration work done at the mouth of Pintlala Creek, Lowndes County, Alabama, February 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 1916, Prefaced by a statement of the work done privately there on February 6, 1916, to Dr. Thomas M. Owen, Director, Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama,” ADAH staff field reports on collecting materials and surveying sites, 1911-1955 (SG9670) (hereby cited as ADAH Staff Field Reports).

<sup>56</sup> For a selective number of burial details, see “Report of Peter A. Brannon, on trip to the site of Old Tallasi, made in company with Dr. H.B. Battle, on February 17, 1916,” ADAH Staff Field Reports; “Report of P.A. Brannon on investigations of the cemetery at Towasi, on the Kohn place below Montgomery, on March 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 1917,” ADAH Staff Field Reports; “Notes on interesting burial uncovered at the 30-Acre Field Cemetery on Pruitt Place, Alabama River, Montgomery, Ala., July 14, 1917,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

the physical layout and recording precise measurements and other data considered crucial to modern standards. Although Brannon and AAS made attempts to record provenance and to keep more in-depth records, most of the time the excavations and collecting techniques were amateur-like and considered illogical and disruptive to the archaeological process. A tool often used was the sounding rod. The device was placed into the ground and using the point of the rod, objects could be identified by the sound or vibrations felt as light pressure was applied. The downside to the sounding rod was that when placed in the ground it frequently shattered the clay artifacts. An alternative to the sounding rod was the process of digging trial holes. Brannon noted in work being done at Toasi in March 1918 that on the second day of excavations “fifty to one hundred trial holes” were performed.<sup>57</sup> If done properly trial holes have the ability to indicate artifacts and structural remnants. Beginning in the 1930s, American archaeology took gradual steps to become a more professionalized body, calling for “more meticulous excavation and recording.”<sup>58</sup> As the work being done by AAS drew national attention, criticism grew from professional archaeologists for their reported amateur techniques, and members began to apply professional methods to their surveying.<sup>59</sup> Brannon’s appointment to the Committee on State Archaeological Surveys was seen as a way to quiet criticism of AAS’s techniques. One of the new methods AAS employed was trenching. “Trenching” called for digging at the bases, and sometime center, of a burial mound and working inward. This method created a more organized, systematic way of excavating, as opposed to the sounding rods.

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<sup>57</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on work done at Toasi, three miles below Montgomery, March 15-20, inclusive, 1918,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>58</sup> Waselkov, “A History of the Alabama Anthropological Society,” 68.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

The *direct historical approach* was another method that came about in the 1930s and one that Brannon favored in his research. By definition it is the “the excavation of documented historic sites in order to link their material culture to prehistoric sites in the same area” or “working from the known to the unknown.”<sup>60</sup> In Brannon’s case, the “known” would be historic trade items of either Spanish, French, or British nationality. From there they would work further to un-surface the “protohistoric then prehistoric cultures.” Although direct historical approach was not defined until the 1930s, Brannon was referencing the method throughout his pre-1930 reports:

A strange coincidence developed in that not one of the burials uncovered by me, and I took out nearly a dozen, showed any evidence of objects of a purely aboriginal nature, accept [sic] the pot accompanying the specimen. The beads and other objects which were placed with the body at internment were in all cases, with the exception above noted, of a trade character. The beads were all glass, silver, bronze and copper.<sup>61</sup>

The European trade items associated with the burial urns, and the aboriginal artifacts of the previous group of Native Americans living at the time (the Alibamos, Mississippians, etc.) assisted Brannon in dating the sites. Within AAS, he was the “principal advocate” of this method.<sup>62</sup> Brannon noted though that not all were fond of the direct historic approach:

I argued that we must interpret pre-historic civilization by a study of the historic culture first exposed to these pre-historic people and then make comparisons. During most of the life of the Committee [on State Archaeological Surveys] my fellow members opposed me in the procedure, but I lived to see that my idea did prevail and that we must study these primitive cultures by a comparison of the things found illustrating the contacts of the two.

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<sup>60</sup> Edwin A. Lyon, *A New Deal for Southeastern Archaeology* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 56. Lyon was paraphrasing Julian H. Steward’s definition in “The Direct Historical Approach to Archaeology,” *American Antiquity* 7, no. 4 (April 1942): 337-343; Michael Deal, “The Role of The Direct Historical Approach in North American Ethnoarchaeology: A Northern Perspective,” *Ethnoarchaeology* 9, no. 1 (April 2017): 30.

<sup>61</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on Trip Made to Tysonville Ferry Macon County, January 9, 1920,” ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>62</sup> Sheldon, “Alabama Anthropological Society Field Activities,” 34. For Brannon’s writing see *The Southern Indian Trade* (Montgomery, AL: Paragon Press, 1935) and “The Pensacola Indian Trade,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (July 1952): 1-15.



That is through a study of the trade relations of these people, then we arrive at the folk-customs in a much better manner than if we attempted to study them altogether through dis-associated cultural suggestions.<sup>63</sup>

Using the accounts of Benjamin Hawkins, the U.S. agent assigned to the Southeastern Indians, and other eighteenth century sources, Brannon and other AAS members were able to document sites and further investigate.<sup>64</sup> Following the field work and collecting, Brannon published pieces in national publications.

### **Report Details: Interactions**

The people Brannon met on his travels were instrumental to his development as a historian. Oftentimes, Brannon relied on both black and white tenant farmers and hunters, as well as government officials, to locate burial mounds and camp sites. Following the protocol of the Alabama Antiquities Act, Owen received reports of pots containing human bones being seen on “recently eroded banks of streams” and artifacts unearthed by the farmer’s plow.<sup>65</sup> Owen in turn would send Brannon out to conduct an investigation. In 1912, for example, Brannon visited the Pintlala Creek site to “investigate the report of a negro tenant” who reported that “his mule had dislodged [a broken burial urn] by stepping too near the edge of the ravine.”<sup>66</sup> Brannon would also speak with locals who put him in contact with those more knowledgeable of local burial sites or collections of celts, projectile points, hammers, etc. that could be purchased. During a trip to the Coloomi site in 1916, Robert Fears, “an old negro ex-slave,” showed Brannon where

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<sup>63</sup> Peter A. Brannon, “Environment and Culture,” *Journal of the Alabama Academy of Science* 16 (September 1944): 26.

<sup>64</sup> Sheldon, “Alabama Anthropological Society Field Activities,” 34; H. Thomas Foster II, “Benjamin Hawkins,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed February 14, 2018, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1058>.

<sup>65</sup> Peter A. Brannon, “Urn-Burial in Central Alabama,” *American Antiquity* 3, no. 3 (January 1938): 228-235.

<sup>66</sup> “Trip to Pintlala Creek, March 31, 1912,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

he found several “objects of aboriginal character.”<sup>67</sup> That same trip, Brannon relied on “several negroes in the neighborhood” to locate the Coloomi site.<sup>68</sup> Brannon was able to locate several sites in Russell County because of the locals:

A negro woman one Susie Smith at once referred us to the where the old store which ‘sold to the Indians’, was located, and with her assistance we were able to trace a number of other locations. She pointed out where the Indian huts used to set, which place is the site of the home of Big Warrior.<sup>69</sup>

While seeking to find the “Creek Indian town” of Hoithlewalli, Brannon noted two individuals who assisted him:

Engaging a colored man, Alonzo Creighton to carry us to the mouth of Goodwater Creek, we arrived at this point about 10 o’clock. I immediately hunted up Taylor Zimmerman, a former slave, and life time resident of this section, of whom I made numerous inquiries concerning and Indian town said to have been located somewhere in the vicinity of the mouth of the creek. He assured us that there was no town above the mouth of the creek, of which he was acquainted, nearer than four and a half of five miles, but thought it possible that one was located on the plantation of Mr. Jim Paulk. He said this point was about four and a half miles up the river but could only be reached in a round about way.<sup>70</sup>

The particular reports that describe the people Brannon came in contact with offer valuable insight into his personality, determination, eagerness to learn, ability to always be on-the-go and his willingness to work holidays.<sup>71</sup> He was a *people person* who sought out every available individual to speak with about the area’s history, interesting happenings, Native American sites, and a variety of other topics while on his travels. His reports reveal a complex web of

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<sup>67</sup> “Report of P.A. Brannon on visit to Coloomi, January 25, 1916,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Town names had many different spellings.

<sup>69</sup> “Report of P.A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director of Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, on trip made to Seale, Fort Bainbridge and other points in Russell County, September 21 and 22, 1922,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>70</sup> Brannon to Owen, January 14, 1914, ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>71</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on trip made to Florala, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1920,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

connections with each individual he spoke with pointing him to additional sources. While searching for a particular burial in Montgomery in January 1914, a gentleman named “Otis” referred Brannon to Mrs. Missouri Brassell, “an old lady in her eighties, and very feeble,” who had an archaeological collection from the area where they were searching. It is not known if he visited with her immediately after, but a travel report dated three years later detailed a visit with Mrs. Brassell who identified areas of interests.<sup>72</sup>

Brannon also interviewed several individuals and included the transcripts in his travel reports. In February 1923, Brannon traveled to Selma to interview Mrs. McCord, the “totally deaf” widow of Dr. McCord, “who practised [sic] medicine in Brazil from 1867 to 1884.” The interview would later serve as a primary source for Brannon’s writings on the post-Civil War flight of many ex-Confederates to Brazil.<sup>73</sup> Brannon interviewed several ex-slaves throughout his reports hoping to learn more about the history of places he visited. “[T]he oldest negro settler,” Brannon wrote, could help “to determine local traditions as far as possible.<sup>74</sup> A particularly interesting individual he came across in his travels was Jake Vanju, a “survivor of the lot of slaves brought over on the *Wanderer*.”<sup>75</sup>

The information that Brannon received from many of the interviews and experiences were later recorded in one of “Through the Years” columns he wrote for the *Montgomery*

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<sup>72</sup> Brannon to Owen, January 1914, ADAH Staff Field Reports; Brannon to Owen, May 12, 1917, ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>73</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, on trip made to Selma, February 22 and 23, 1923,” ADAH Staff Field Reports; See Brannon, “Southern Immigration to Brazil,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 1 (Summer 1930): 74-95; (Fall 1930): 280-305; (Winter 1930): 467-488.

<sup>74</sup> “Report of P.A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director of Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, on trip made to Seale, Fort Bainbridge and other points in Russell County, September 21 and 22, 1922,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>75</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on Trip Made to Russell County, February 1 to 4, 1917,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

*Advertiser* from 1931 to 1950. One modern archaeologist commented that Brannon's reliance on "retrospective interviews" in which the interviewee would tell him of "being present at many of the sites approximately 100 years earlier" had the potential to be a flawed resource, but nonetheless important because Brannon was able to at least have a starting point from which to work.<sup>76</sup>

### **Report Details: Transportation and Travel**

In his travels on behalf of ADAH, Brannon used every mode of transportation available at the time. Since some of the mounds were difficult to reach by road, he was often forced to walk a good deal. His visit to Pintlala Creek in March 1917 illustrates the trouble Brannon encountered in reaching remote sites. There, Brannon and Robert B. Burnham, a fellow AAS member, faced a flooded roadway. After two attempts to cross at other locations, they hired an African American local to assist in carrying their equipment across, and, after three hours, they finally reached their destination on foot.<sup>77</sup> In 1920, Brannon and several members of the AAS, set out to visit the Old Talise site in Tallapoosa County. This day too was filled with travel and weather issues, beginning with a five-mile walking detour after a bridge that had "washed away near the McKenzie homestead site."<sup>78</sup> Upon completing their survey, the men returned to their starting point to find out that another detour was necessary after a "steam engine boiler [fell] thru a small bridge [making it] necessary to detour...six miles south." If all that was not bad enough, they then attempted unsuccessfully to "push the car out the mud four or five times," but

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<sup>76</sup> H. Thomas Foster II, *Archaeology of the Lower Creek Indians, 1715-1836* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 40-41.

<sup>77</sup> "Report of P.A. Brannon On Trip Made to Pintlala Creek, March 6, 1917," ADAH Staff Field Reports; Peter A. Brannon, ed., *Handbook of the Alabama Anthropological Society 1920*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> "Report of Peter A. Brannon, on trip made to the site of Old Talise in Tallapoosa County, February 24, 1920," ADAH Administrative Files. Also cited in Waselkov, "A History of the Alabama Anthropological Society," 66.

ultimately had to “hire a block and tackling outfit” to pull them out. They finally reached home around 9pm.<sup>79</sup> Another time Brannon used a government rowboat while assisting U.S. Engineer Major D. M. Andrews in locating a mound in Talladega County.<sup>80</sup> Horse and buggy were the means of transportation while in Pittsview, Russell County.<sup>81</sup>

### **Report Details: Archival & Museum Collecting**

As ADAH's chief clerk, Brannon traveled the state collecting archival material, including manuscripts, artwork, and museum-quality objects that pertained to the history of the state.<sup>82</sup> His keen eye was always on the lookout for new items, illustrated by his acquisition of a full-length oil portrait of William McIntosh. Indeed, it is today considered one of the most important pieces owned by the archives. McIntosh, a Lower Creek war leader also named Tustunugee Hutkee was from the town of Coweta. His name reveals—as does his portrait—his bicultural origins.<sup>83</sup> Dressed in both traditional Creek and Euro-American attire, the nine-foot tall portrait is an important period piece documenting the relationship between the two dominant identities in the old Southwest.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> “Report of Peter A Brannon on visit to sundry local and aboriginal points in Talladega County, Alabama, September 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 1916,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>81</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on Trip Made to Russell County, February 1 to 4, 1917,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>82</sup> The reports do not indicate whether Brannon made contact with individuals prior to his visits or if the collections he acquired were donated at the time with no prior communication. In addition, it should be noted that the accession records from this period were not consistent, making it difficult to match up the items Brannon listed in his reports and the accession records. Entries ranged from detail descriptions to a single-word description.

<sup>83</sup> McIntosh’s father, Chilly McIntosh, was a Scottish trader and his mother Senoya, a Creek from the powerful Wind Clan. See Andrew K. Frank, *Creeks & Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 96-113.

<sup>84</sup> Laquita Thomson, “Nathan Negus and the Portrait of Gen. William McIntosh,” *Alabama Heritage* 50 (Fall 1998): 44-46.



*William McIntosh (ADAH)*

Brannon knew of the portrait as a young boy and reminisced years later that he saw the “big picture” hanging in James Kivlin’s Bar “under the old Central Hotel” in Columbus, Georgia. Although too young to enter, Brannon detailed that the painting hung “behind the cigar counter in front of the hanging doors and could be seen from the street.”<sup>85</sup> In 1912, a year after

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<sup>85</sup> Brannon, “The McIntosh Portrait at the Capitol,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 3, 1935. Brannon, *Handles and Spouts: A Collector’s Story* (Montgomery, AL: self-published, 1939), 4-5. Chilly McIntosh, William’s son, sold the portrait to James Kivlin in 1832.

he began at ADAH, Brannon got the approval from Owen to approach Kivlin's nephew and heir, Edgar C. Mayo regarding purchase of the portrait. Kivlin's price of \$200 was more than ADAH could afford. After nearly ten years of negotiations, Brannon traveled to Columbus in September 1922 to supervise the portrait's crating after the agreed upon price of \$500 was paid.<sup>86</sup> Too large to fit in a vehicle, Brannon had to arrange for a freight car to deliver the portrait to Montgomery.<sup>87</sup> The portrait hung in the state's House of Representatives chambers until ADAH moved to its present building in 1940.

Brannon was confident that the portrait was painted by Washington Allston (1779-1843) based on the monogram painted on McIntosh's moccasin and consultation with noted art historians at the time. Several years went by with the misattribution until the 1950s when an art historian discovered one of Nathan Negus' journals. Nathan and Joseph Negus were brothers and itinerant painters originally from Massachusetts. They had traveled to Alabama in hopes of cashing in on the newly-available land and opportunities. Nathan's journal revealed they had traveled to McIntosh's home in Indian Springs, Georgia to paint both William and his youngest daughter. Although disappointed to not have an Allston in the collection, Brannon finally yielded to the truth.<sup>88</sup>

The Phillips Civil War collection stands out as one of the most complete museum collections Brannon acquisitioned for the Department. Starting in April 1915, Brannon began to visit Dr. L. W. Phillips, a member of the 7<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry Regiment, who lived in Crawford

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<sup>86</sup> "Report of P.A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director of Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, on trip made to Seale, Fort Bainbridge and other points in Russell County, September 21 and 22, 1922," ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>87</sup> Brannon, "The McIntosh Portrait at the Capitol," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 3, 1935.

<sup>88</sup> Agnes Dods, "Joseph and Nathan Negus, Itinerant Painters," *Antiques* 76 (November 1959): 434-437; Thomson, 44-46.

to “persuade” him to donate to the Department his “papers, war records and relics.” Although Brannon came home that first day empty-handed, Phillips did assure him that he would be visiting Montgomery in a few weeks and “promised” to bring some of the items to the Department.<sup>89</sup> In March 1917, Brannon visited Dr. Phillips again and this time Phillips donated to the department a “nice” assortment of “war relics” including, his “cavalry sabre and belt,” “military coat showing captain’s stripes,” Haston & Company manufactured pistol, a Colt pistol, and various other historical items.<sup>90</sup> The following year, Phillips donated a saddle that he “captured at Suffolk, Va., in 1863 from a Major of a Pennsylvania Regiment after an engagement.”<sup>91</sup>

A handful of Brannon’s reports detail surveying, inventorying, and collecting county-level records. In June 1923, Brannon visited Washington County, where “in the vault of the Probate Office” he found “the records of old Washington District, Mississippi Territory, Washington County of the Alabama Territory, and Washington County since the creation of the state.”<sup>92</sup> He noted that the Alabama and Mississippi Territory papers were in the old Court House at the time of a fire, but that they had had “new bindings” and were in “fairly good condition.”<sup>93</sup> In 1917, he attempted to persuade a group of county officials “to turn the papers over to the

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<sup>89</sup> “Report of P. A. Brannon, Chief Clerk, on work done in Russell County, Alabama, and Muskogee and Chattahoochee Counties, Georgia, in the interest of the Department, April 12<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 1915, inclusive,” ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>90</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on trip made to sundry points in Russell County, March 21 to 31, 1917,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>91</sup> “Report of P.A. Brannon on Trip made to Russell County February 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 1918,” ADAH Staff Field Reports. Several of the items donated by Phillips are on display in the *Alabama Voices* exhibit at ADAH.

<sup>92</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, on work done in Washington County during the week of June 25 – 30 inclusive [1923],” ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*



Department” due to their “deplorable” condition.<sup>94</sup> That same trip he collected church records and various newspaper issues of the *Southern Republic* (Opelika), *Southern Era* (Opelika), *Union Springs Herald and Times*, and the *Russell Register*.<sup>95</sup> During a trip to Selma in 1923 Brannon secured a scrapbook detailing Captain James Craig’s company in the Creek War of 1813-1814 from a distant relative. Within the scrapbook were inventories, muster rolls, military orders and ration lists.<sup>96</sup> While in Crawford, the once county seat of Russell County, Brannon met with Mrs. William Nisbet, the niece of U.S. agent to the Creek Nation John Crowell (1780-1846) and secured “two deeds of land from the Indians on [Crowell’s] plantation.”<sup>97</sup> Although his acquisitions were not systematic but acquired by chance encounter, they ultimately formed the core of ADAH’s impressive museum and archival collections.

### **New Leadership, Outreach and the Alabama Centennial**

The 1920s were filled with new outreach activities, leadership and tension. The decade began with the unexpected death of Owen in 1920 and his widow, Marie Owen, being named his replacement.<sup>98</sup> Although Brannon continued to visit archaeological sites, a variety of extension work activities were added to his plate. Included in the new activities was the promotion of the

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<sup>94</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon on Trip Made to Russell County, February 1 to 4, 1917,” ADAH Staff Field Reports. Brannon visited the Russell County Court House once more in 1927, see “Report of trip to Russell County, June 25 and 26 1927,” ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, on trip made to Selma, February 22 and 23, 1923,” ADAH Staff Field Reports. The scrapbook has been digitized: <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/voices/id/3531/rec/5>.

<sup>97</sup> “Report of P. A. Brannon, Chief Clerk, on work done in Russell County, Alabama, and Muskogee and Chattahoochee Counties, Georgia, in the interest of the Department, April 12<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 1915, inclusive,” 3, ADAH Administrative Files; Heather M. Haley, “John Crowell,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3903>.

<sup>98</sup> “Mrs. Thomas Owen Will Assume New Duties on Monday,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 4, 1920; Unknown author, “Brannon Is Chosen Library Director,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 13, 1920.

Alabama Centennial Commission, especially after 1921. Marie Owen asked Brannon to include “illustrated material” in his future reports.<sup>99</sup> This was striking difference from his earlier reports when he simply described to Tom the nature of trips.<sup>100</sup> The new reports include photographs and newspaper clippings and were heavy on the southern portion of the state. The new director’s first order of business was to locate and designate early statehood historic sites.<sup>101</sup>

The marking of historic spots became a prominent tool for historical memory during the first twenty years of the twentieth century.<sup>102</sup> The automobile and the desire to visit allowed individuals to travel further distances more quickly. In Alabama, the centennial commemoration of Alabama statehood also increased the recognition of historic designations. During the 1910-1911 fiscal year, Owen bought for the State nearly five acres of land where the French fort was located. In May 1912, Brannon assisted the Colonial Dames in selecting the location of a historic marker.<sup>103</sup> Brannon led the charge in designating spots (especially after the Alabama Centennial Commission was launched in 1919) and oftentimes served as the contact person for local organizations looking to designate a location important to the development of the state, whether it be a structure, battlefield, or a particular landscape. Brannon’s earliest mention of designating

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<sup>99</sup> Not all of the reports following the recommendation were accompanied with photographs. “Report of P.A. Brannon, Curator, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, Department of Archives and History, covering the work in Baldwin County and in Mobile, August 3-12 inclusive 1922,” page 11, ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>100</sup> Brannon mentioned taking photographs in his earlier reports, but they were never included in the actual reports.

<sup>101</sup> 1919-1920 Annual Report, ADAH Board of Trustees Files (SG17913).

<sup>102</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 276.

<sup>103</sup> 1910-1911 Annual Report, ADAH Board of Trustees Files; Brannon to Owen, May 17, 1912, ADAH Staff Field Reports; Gregory A. Waselkov, “Introduction: Recent Archaeological and Historical Research,” in *Fort Toulouse: The French Outpost at the Alabamas on the Coosa River* by Daniel H. Thomas (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989, vii-xli; Peter A. Brannon, *Some Illustrations to Suggest Reasons for Fort Toulouse State Park* (scrapbook), ADAH (SPR349).

historic sites was when the State recognized Fort Toulouse near modern day Wetumpka. In August 1922, Brannon traveled to south Alabama for a ten-day trip to assist in various Centennial activities. His report indicates that he assisted locals in establishing a list of places in order of their historic importance including, Fort Mims, William Weatherford's grave, shell mounds, and various other places.<sup>104</sup> In 1922 Brannon traveled to St. Stephens for the unveiling of the historic marker at the site and to "make certain investigations and to do extension work in Washington County."<sup>105</sup>

Beginning with Brannon's tenure, ADAH began to assist in the promotion of local historical societies.<sup>106</sup> In August 1922, Brannon met with Mrs. Lydia J. N. Comings in Fairhope to speak with her about her interest in establishing a county historical society to "present...a more intelligent way the traditions of its people, and to preserve and perpetuate it's historical points."<sup>107</sup> In June of the following year, Brannon traveled back to Fairhope to meet with the newly established Baldwin County Historical Society and to give a talk on the "historical data" of the county and also inform them of ADAH's efforts to "enable further organization of historical societies and to protect historical spots."<sup>108</sup> He was asked to speak at their first meeting

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<sup>104</sup> "Report of P.A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, Department of Archives and History, covering work done in Baldwin County and in Mobile, August 3-12 inclusive 1922," ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>105</sup> "Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director of State Department Archives and History, Montgomery. Extension work in Washington, Monroe and Clarke Counties, September 27, October 2, 1922," ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>106</sup> Richard J. Cox suggests that both the promotion of local historical societies and ADAH's attempt to survey county records were Brannon's ideas. See Richard J. Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage 1850-1935," *Alabama Review* 40, no. 4 (October 1987): 294-295.

<sup>107</sup> "Report of P.A. Brannon, Curator, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, Department of Archives and History, covering the work in Baldwin County and in Mobile, August 3-12 inclusive 1922," ADAH Staff Field Reports; Unknown author, "Baldwin County is Interested in Research," *Montgomery Times*, August 15, 1922.

<sup>108</sup> "Baldwin County Society Elects," *Fairhope Courier*, July 29, 1923. The article is included in "Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, on work done in Baldwin and Monroe Counties, June 20-24, 1923," ADAH Administrative Files.

in Blakely the next year. The Moundville Historical Society also called upon Brannon to assist in developing plans for membership, locating necessary research concerning the Moundville archaeological site and developing a plan for tourism.<sup>109</sup> He also was instrumental in the development of the Russell County Historical Society and the Tennessee Valley Historical Society.<sup>110</sup> In 1937 alone Brannon visited nearly all of the counties south of Birmingham “aiding...communities in their interests in local history.”<sup>111</sup>

Exhibits were another form of outreach Brannon performed during the centennial celebration. In June 1921, Brannon represented ADAH at the Pike County Centennial Celebration.<sup>112</sup> The Centennial Committee asked that ADAH provide artifacts that would “illustrate conditions” of what the area must have been like at the time of the county’s founding in December 1821. The exhibit consisted of “several hundred objects” – from ADAH and private collections – including, the hinge from “the first county jail in Monticello...spinning wheels, dresses made from the American Revolution, old wearing apparel, fire-arms, Indian relics, and [a] general collection of pioneer objects.”<sup>113</sup> In June 1922, Brannon traveled to Albany to the Tennessee Valley Industrial Exposition. The exhibit, co-sponsored with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), featured “pioneer and colonial objects,” including, “counterpins,

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<sup>109</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, On Trip Made to Moundville, Hale County, August 29, 30 and 31<sup>st</sup>,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>110</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, on Activities during the Year Oct. 1, 1922, to Sep. 30, 1923,” ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>111</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, Covering Activities, in the Main, From October 1, 1936 to October 20, 1937,” ADAH Administrative Files (SG17916).

<sup>112</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director, on trip made to Pike County, June 18---25, 1921, inclusive, for the purpose of attending the Pike County Centennial and Representing the Alabama State Department of Archives and History Thereat,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

quilts, couch covers, silver-ware old china, glassware, and sundry items.” In addition to objects from ADAH, Brannon displayed General Joseph Wheeler’s uniform and his Spanish-American sword.<sup>114</sup> Later that year, Brannon set-up a display at the Autauga County Fair. Mrs. Lewis S. Golson’s bird egg collection, “the only complete collection of bird eggs in Alabama,” was included in the display.<sup>115</sup>

It was not uncommon for Brannon to be asked to give a lecture at the places he visited. The nature of his talks varied as much as his “Through the Years” columns. He was sensitive to his audience whether schoolchildren or adults. In a letter addressed to the principal of Florala High School, for example, Brannon feared his talk on the burial customs of Central Alabama natives was “too technical” for high school students.<sup>116</sup> In his early years Brannon was offering topics ranging from DeSoto’s route through Alabama, the Upper and Lower Creek nations, the “Alibamo Indians,” and “Aboriginal Costumes.”<sup>117</sup> As the years went by and Brannon’s job duties change so did the topics. “The Need for Local History in High School Education,” “Political Economy in Alabama History,” and “The Lure of American Glass” were just some of the topics he spoke on during the 1930s.<sup>118</sup> Brannon utilized other methods of spreading

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<sup>114</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, on participation of this Department in the Tennessee Valley Industrial Exposition held at Albany, February 18-28, 1922,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>115</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, on participation of the Department of Archives & History in the Autauga County Fair, Prattville, November 7-11, inclusive, 1922, to Mrs. Marie B. Owen, Director,” ADAH Staff Field Reports.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Brannon to J. E. Hendley, November 18, 1920, ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>118</sup> “Historical and Patriotic Talks, 1936-7” and “Historical and Patriotic Talks, 1937-38,” ADAH Administrative Files (SG17916).

Alabama history. In 1937, Brannon lectured for eight weeks on WSFA radio as a “stimulus to the celebration of one hundred years of Montgomery as a municipality.”<sup>119</sup>

In addition to talks given to civic organizations and elementary and secondary students, Brannon for several years, during his own time, taught Alabama history at the Alabama Woman’s College (now Huntingdon College). In 1926, his students organized a group “to promote the study of Alabama History, to perpetuate its traditions and to stimulate and encourage a patriotic love for the State and the Southland.”<sup>120</sup> They named the group the Brannon Historical Society.

## **Conclusion**

Brannon’s early years with the department were spent traveling the state for a variety of reasons. These peregrinations were important to Brannon’s development as a historian, and his travel reports highlight several themes that were emerging at the time, particularly the professionalization of history and archaeology. Brannon’s reports provide a glimpse into ADAH’s initial missions and growth, the multiple outreach services it performed, including local government records surveys, marking of historic sites, and documentation of the centennial commemoration of Alabama statehood. Overall, Brannon’s excursions across the state highlight his emergence as an authority on Alabama history. For Brannon these trips went beyond simply doing what was required of his job. These trips were instrumental to his development as a researcher, writer, advocate, curator, archivist, and agency head. The education he received on the road would later be disseminated in his writings and lectures.<sup>121</sup> Without the formidable

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<sup>119</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, Covering Activities, in the Main, From October 1, 1936 through October 20, 1937,” ADAH Administrative Files (SG17916).

<sup>120</sup> “Organization,” *Brannon Historical Quarterly*, Bulletin No. 1 (March 1, 1927): 1.

<sup>121</sup> It is impossible to say whether all of Brannon’s travel reports were included in the collections that were researched for this paper.

years, it would be hard to imagine Brannon being able to maintain his rigorous, all-encompassing writing regime and the relentless reference correspondence he maintained for so many years.

## Chapter 2: Dissemination

Following Tom Owen's death in 1920, his widow Mrs. Marie Bankhead Owen was elected director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. In 1925, Mrs. Owen took an unexpected year-long leave of absence and Brannon was named acting director beginning September 1, 1925. A single letter dated March 9, 1926 between the two, however, reveals a very different reality: Mrs. Owen never intended to come back. During her hiatus in Florida, Mrs. Owen informed Brannon that she had “definitely decided to resume the Directorship,” citing financial difficulties as her cause for return. “OF COURSE ALL THIS EXPLANATION IS CONFIDENTIAL,” Mrs. Owen added, and that Brannon could tell inquiring minds that she “only had a years [sic] leave for rest, and will get back to work in the fall.”<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Owen's return in 1926 began their often-sour work relationship. During her absence, Mrs. Owen received updates from a few ADAH employees. When she returned, she accused Brannon of trying to “usurp her position,” making negative remarks in public about her administrative practices and her favoring employees, amongst other things.<sup>2</sup> When she did

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<sup>1</sup> Marie B. Owen to Brannon, March 9, 1926, ADAH Administrative Files (SG17911); Peter A. Brannon, “Statement of Peter A. Brannon, Curator,” ADAH Administrative Files (SG17911).

<sup>2</sup> Brannon, “Statement of Peter A. Brannon, Curator,” ADAH Administrative Files. The statement is not addressed to an individual, but it can be assumed that it was meant for newly-inaugurated Governor David Bibb Graves (1873-1942). For Brannon's denial of the allegations, see “Statement of Peter A. Brannon, Curator.” The tension also strained the relationship between Marie and the Alabama Anthropological Society who backed Brannon. Immediately after her return, legislation was drafted for the curator to serve simultaneously as assistant director and to have executive powers. Marie Owen believed that Brannon was behind this power move, but he vowed that he took no part. Soon after, in September 1927, newspapers reported Brannon had been fired. Letters were being sent to



return, she used this information as well as allegations that Brannon attempted a power move soon after her return as means to diminish Brannon's roles. A friend of Brannon's, however, later recounted that Mrs. Owen was jealous of Brannon's growing popularity, starting with the publication of the *Pageant Book* (1926), a souvenir guidebook for the activities and pageants commemorating the history of the state that coincided with the United States Sesquicentennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup>

From his letters and correspondence, it is difficult to find any personal animosity from Brannon towards Marie Owen. "Hoping to restore harmony in the Department," Brannon offered his resignation as curator to Governor William W. Brandon (1923-1927) on two occasions between November 1926 and January 1927, yet each were declined.<sup>4</sup> The drop-off in travel reports in the late 1920s coincided with the inter-department tension. By the 1930s, Brannon had been assigned to the Military Records Division, a job that "confined" him to the office and limited the work he did with local historical societies, civil organizations and the schools.<sup>5</sup> Yet, these years (late 1920s-1950s) were crucial to another phase of Brannon's career: his writings. Perhaps, because of restraints placed on him by Mrs. Owen, Brannon found freedom in writing. Through his writings, the bulk being done on his own time, Brannon hoped to "make history popular."<sup>6</sup>

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the governor on Brannon's behalf and editorials were written in his favor, but Gov. Graves did not consent to the decision. See ADAH Administrative Files (SG17913) for specifics.

<sup>3</sup> Ward, 1-5; Peter A. Brannon, ed., *The Pageant Book: Official Program of the Ceremonies and the Pageant in Celebration of Alabama Home Coming Week, May 5-6* (Montgomery, AL: WPWPC, 1926). For more on the Brannon's involvement, see Unknown author, "Former Columbus Man Honored in Alabama," *Columbus Daily Enquirer* (Georgia), April 15, 1926.

<sup>4</sup> "Statement of Peter A. Brannon, Curator," ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files.

This chapter will focus on Brannon's career as a journalist-historian and argue that his weekly column, his work as editor of two statewide publications, and the plethora of pamphlets and journal articles, garnered him respect amongst his readers and peers and also furthered his career. His writings are part of his legacy, yet nothing has been written on his methods, subjects and their relation to Alabama historiography.



Brannon in his office, ca. 1932. (ADAH)

### **Nationally-published articles**

Although the bulk of Brannon's writings were published in local outlets, he did manage to have a few of his pieces published nationally. Even prior to Brannon's beginnings at ADAAH,

he had published in a reputable scholarly journal. Initially a paper read at an AAS meeting in 1909, “Aboriginal Remains in the Middle Chattahoochee Valley of Alabama and Georgia,” was published that same year in *American Anthropologist*.<sup>7</sup> Brannon began visiting the Lower Creek mounds and town sites in 1905. His investigations were concerned primarily with finding objects and little to do with structural analysis that required more in-depth, controlled investigations. H. Thomas Foster, in his work on Lower Creek archaeology, wrote that although Brannon’s methods were not up to par he “is to be commended for publishing much of his work and for his early research in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley.”<sup>8</sup>

Following up on his road trips, field work and collecting, Brannon published pieces in national publications. Most notably, his findings on the unique burials were published in *American Antiquity*, a leading anthropological and archaeological journal, in 1938. In this article, Brannon focused attention on several central Alabama sites including Pintlala (Lowndes County), Taskigi (Elmore County), Durant’s Bend (Dallas County) and Huith-le-walli (located on the Tallapoosa River).<sup>9</sup> It was at these sites in central Alabama, that Brannon and fellow AAS members had unearthed several hundred burial urns. In these burials, the bones—after being stripped of the skin—of adults and children were placed in earthenware vessels and buried. The urns were found in cemeteries, none within the earthen mounds. Animal effigies and clay ear pins were oftentimes found with the burials. Only at Taskigi were European-made artifacts found (glass beads). The Pintlala site was never used during the historic period adding further proof to

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<sup>7</sup> Peter A. Brannon, “Aboriginal Remains in the Middle Chattahoochee Valley of Alabama and Georgia,” *American Anthropologist* 11, no. 2 (April-June 1909): 186-198.

<sup>8</sup> Foster, *Archaeology of the Lower Muskogee Creek Indians, 1715-1836*, 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Peter A. Brannon, “Urn-Burial in Central Alabama,” *American Antiquity* 3, no. 3 (January 1938): 228-235. Clarence B. Moore had visited Taskigi and Durant’s Bend previously.

Brannon's argument that the natives buried here never had contact with Europeans. The travel reports of early years make up the bulk of the research for the article. Brannon's use of the direct historical approach to assist in dating the sites is evident in the article when he notes DeSoto's visit to "Talise," and how French records indicate specific Alibamo towns. Researchers today have mixed reviews concerning Brannon's conclusions. Brannon's point that the natives from this period were linked to the Alibamo tribe is "overwhelmingly" accepted by modern researchers.<sup>10</sup> Archaeologist Craig Sheldon wrote that Brannon's view of the burial practices being most likely Choctaw-related is far-reaching considering the "custom of disarticulating skeletal remains for burial purposes is too widespread in the Southeast to be indicative of any specific ethnic affinity."<sup>11</sup>

### ***Arrow Points***

During his tenure as president of AAS, Brannon initiated and edited the group's publication *Arrow Points* from its beginning in 1920 to its cessation in 1937. The journal highlighted the society's trips, discoveries, early Alabama history, artifact descriptions, collectors from around the state, and various other pieces that garnered national attention to the work being done in the state. Brannon footed the bill for *Arrow Points*' printing and distribution. Archaeologists have noted the importance of the writings. At this time, Brannon began corresponding with nationally-recognized archaeologists, including J. Walter Fewkes, chief of the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Anthropology, Carl E. Guthe, head of the University of Michigan's Division of Archaeology, and University of Chicago anthropologist Thorne Deuel.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Amanda L. Regnier, "Stylistic Analysis of Burial Urns from the Protohistoric Period in Central Alabama" (master's thesis, University of Alabama, 2001), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Sheldon, "The Mississippian-Historic Transition in Central Alabama," 59.

<sup>12</sup> Waselkov, "A History of the Alabama Anthropological Society," 67; Waselkov, personal communication with author, December 12, 2017; John H. Blitz, *Moundville* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 3.

Others came down to see the collections and to visit the mounds and burials.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History in New York wrote to Brannon that he was pleased with the work being done in Alabama and that *Arrow Points* was a “splendid idea” and a model for other institutions looking to spotlight their research.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Alabama Highways***

Prior to his stint with the *AHQ*, and a handful of years before he began his “Though the Years” columns, Brannon partnered with the Alabama State Highway Department to publish stories in their publication, *Alabama Highways*. From 1927-1935, Brannon wrote over fifty pieces that described early transportation methods, mail routes, and other roads and passages that were disappearing in the wake of new transportation technologies. With mobility increasing, the decrease in railroad dependency and urban sprawl’s effect on small towns, perhaps Brannon wrote these short pieces to remind readers of old times and places in Alabama that were quickly vanishing. His research on the old Federal Road, particularly pieces from *Alabama Highways*, was the “spadework” for Southerland and Brown’s 1989 seminal work on the Federal Road.<sup>15</sup>

### **Other Writings & Reviews**

In his spare time, Brannon often self-published booklets. Brannon considered them to be “less technical” in their nature when compared to his other writings.<sup>16</sup> “I do it for the fun of it,” Brannon told one newspaper writer, “I do it merely to satisfy an insatiable curiosity about history

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<sup>13</sup> Unknown author, “Dr. Moorehead Visits Indians Mounds Friday,” *Montgomery Times*, January 30, 1920.

<sup>14</sup> Clark Wissler to Brannon, February 14, 1921, republished in *Arrow Points* 2, no. 2 (1921): 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> Henry deLeon Southerland and Jerry Elijah Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama, 1806-1836* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>16</sup> James Saxon Childers, “Burial Urns Bare Strange History: Greatest Authority on State’s Past Interviewed,” *Birmingham News—Age-Herald*, September 24, 1933.

and the ways of men.”<sup>17</sup> The pamphlets were typically self-funded and printed in small quantities for friends using a mimeograph. Oftentimes he included drawings and stories he had written in *Alabama Highways* and “Through the Years.” They often told stories of trips he made with friends that recounted an historical route or visit to a place of interest. *South Around to Cross Ellicott’s Line* (1938) was a scrapbook detailing a trip he and others took from Claiborne to Alabama’s territorial capital, St. Stephens. He complimented the trip summary with photographs and transcriptions of historical documents detailing the places they had visited.<sup>18</sup>

A few of his pamphlets and article-length publications did make headlines, but not for the reasons Brannon would have preferred. His writing style could have benefitted from an editor. He often rambled using long, winding sentences. Academic historians, in particular, were quick to call out Brannon’s faults. One reviewer went as far as to say that the piece being reviewed was a “guide to the manner in which history should not be written” and that Brannon “gathered a heterogeneous mass of facts, and without a plan or revision has presented his material under a flourishing title.”<sup>19</sup> A different review said, the work “consists of information on many subjects digested and skeletonized to almost statistical form.”<sup>20</sup> “Brannon wrote in a rather convoluted style,” wrote one author, “making it necessary for the reader to read slowly and sometime reread

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *South Around to Cross Ellicott’s Line* (1938), ADAH (LPP6). The scrapbook has been digitized: <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/photo/id/33897/rec/48>. See also *The Colonel’s Recapture of the Horseshoe: A True Story* (Montgomery, AL: February 1938).

<sup>19</sup> Walter B. Posey, review of *Lilies, Lions and Bag-Pipes: Tales of Other Days in Alabama* by Peter A. Brannon, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 21, no. 4 (March 1935): 595-596, accessed October 4, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1895504>.

<sup>20</sup> V.L. Bedsole, review of *Romance of Beginnings of Some Alabama Industries: An American Pilgrimage Address* by Peter A. Brannon, *Journal of Southern History* 6, no. 1 (February 1940): 120, accessed October 4, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2191949>.

his work in order to get the correct meaning.”<sup>21</sup> Another modern historian wrote that Brannon did little to “flesh out” and place a particular character in early Alabama history “in proper historical context with the Seminole War.”<sup>22</sup> One of Brannon’s better known works, *The Southern Indian Trade* (1935) was not a hit with professional archaeologists at the time of its publication. Frustrated, Brannon wrote to a friend:

I insist that these relations with the pre-historic people are right on the edge of the beginning of history, and culturally are important, therefore need investigating. The subject is, to say the least of it, fascinating.<sup>23</sup>

Grammatically, one reviewer noted “A lack of uniformity in citations” and “at least one typographical error per page.”<sup>24</sup>

These academic reviews do not do justice to Brannon's pieces. Brannon wrote for both the professionals and the general public, striving to “make history popular.” Brannon aimed his writing at the general public--the everyday person. To captivate, Brannon needed first to educate and provide the facts; secondly, he had to tell the stories in a manner that were both interesting and worthwhile. His "histories" were actually adventures, bubbling over with the excitement of discovery, linking events and place. They were meant to convey the joy of discovery and to encourage others to pursue the past. These thoughts were with Brannon when he began in 1931

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<sup>21</sup> Pintlala Historical Association, “Peter Alexander Brannon,” 3.

<sup>22</sup> John T. Ellisor, ““Wild People in the Woods’: General Jackson, Savannah Jack, and the First Seminole War in the Alabama Territory,” *Alabama Review* 70, no. 3 (July 2017): 191-221.

<sup>23</sup> Brannon to Dr. William A. Read, February 11, 1935, Peter A. Brannon papers, 1860-1964, ADAH. Quoted in Waselkov, “A History of the Alabama Anthropological Society,” 72.

<sup>24</sup> W. Neil Franklin, review of *The Southern Indian Trade: Being Particularly a Study of Material from the Tallapoosa River Valley of Alabama* by Peter A. Brannon, *Journal of Southern History* 2, no. 2 (May 1936): 271, accessed October 4, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2191704>.

his weekly “Through the Years” columns in the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Luckily for Brannon, his audience, as we will see, was all ears, if you will.

### “Through the Years” Overview

The day after his death in 1967, an editorial in the *Montgomery Advertiser* stated that “Fortunately Dr. Brannon left a wealth of writing, including almost 900 newspaper columns in *The Advertiser*, to preserve much of the wealth of Alabama’s history as a legacy beyond price for the state he loved.”<sup>25</sup> University of Alabama librarian William Stanley Hoole (1903-1990) published a bibliography of Brannon’s writings and noted that the work “will be useful to devotees of the subjects for many years to come: indeed, his work cannot be forgotten.”<sup>26</sup> The title of the column, “Through the Years,” is, for obvious reasons, representative of Brannon’s purpose and intent. It is unknown whether Brannon himself coined the column’s title or if it was the work of the newspaper staff. Either way it ties in perfectly with the reoccurring theme of reminiscing. And Brannon's focus and style reflect national patterns.

### Column Context

In his influential work *Mystic Chords of Memory* (1993), historian Michael Kammen wrote, “The first decade of the twentieth century certainly brought a general quickening of interest in local and regional traditions.”<sup>27</sup> Ellen Fitzpatrick, in her study of professional

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<sup>25</sup> Editorial, “Dr. Peter Brannon,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 7, 1967, Surname Files. The entire collection of Brannon’s “Through the Years” columns can be found on ADAH’s digital archives website at <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/search/collection/voices/field/collec/searchterm/Peter%20Brannon%20papers/mode/exact>.

<sup>26</sup> William Stanley Hoole, *Alabama Bibliography: A Short-Title Catalogue of the Publications of Peter Alexander Brannon former director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Confederate Publishing, 1984), 6. Although in need of an update, the bibliography is invaluable to anyone researching Brannon, local history writing and early transportation. See Appendix 1 for titles and other necessary information excluded from Hoole’s compilation.

<sup>27</sup> M. Kammen, 274.



historical writing in the United States, wrote that historians during the 1920s and 1930s lacked the analytical language and interpretation that is paramount in today's historical writing and that they had a "quaint affection for local communities."<sup>28</sup> Local history's place in historical writing has ebbed-and-flowed. The earliest histories to appear in the United States focused on local, state, or regional topics. In the late nineteenth century, focus shifted more broadly to the nation as a whole, especially political history. Local studies were viewed as subjects for antiquarians and its authors deemed as amateurs by those with degrees. This notion held until the 1970s when social history and the bottom-up approach that examined local places and people emerged.<sup>29</sup>

Historian David J. Russo pointed to the post-Civil War years as the beginning of local historical writing's emergence in newspapers. "[T]he newspaper was unquestionably a major outlet for local historical writing and constituted a single source for readers interested in accounts of both the past and the present." "The newspaper," Russo summarized, "contributed significantly to the popularization of local historical writing."<sup>30</sup> Ian Tyrell noted that historical reading was prominent during the first half of the twentieth century including, local history, popular forms, and academic monographs.<sup>31</sup> Carol Kammen elaborated further in her seminal monograph, *On Doing Local History*. Kammen pointed out that prior to the 1930s, local history that was featured in newspapers appeared "in the form of reminiscences, letters, and . . .

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<sup>28</sup> Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880-1980* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 142.

<sup>29</sup> David J. Russo, *Keepers of the Past: Local Historical Writing in the United States, 1820s-1930s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988), 1-5; Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Russo, 83-84.

<sup>31</sup> Tyrell, 44.

interviews with aged or notable people—or survivors of earlier times or startling events.”<sup>32</sup> The 1930s, however, saw a new method that Kammen labeled “local-color writing.” Journalists and editors “who reveled in an anecdote, a joke, or a regional dialect would take a story, polish it, and present it to the paper’s readers.”<sup>33</sup> Peter Brannon used this as templet for many of articles, particularly those where he wrote of local colloquialisms, myths, and manners. Kammen’s point that newspapers appealed to a “diverse clientele” and offered a variety of topics to attract those typically uninterested in history resonates with the broad reading appeal Brannon offered in his columns.<sup>34</sup> In her piece on the 1919 and 1947 legislation passed by New York legislature that established local historians, Judith M. Wellman found that the new hires often saw themselves as preservationists of local records and artifacts, “scholars, both as researchers and as writers,” as well as public educators.<sup>35</sup>

### **Other Motivations**

Brannon used his column as advertisement for ADAH and urged his readers to preserve family papers, scrapbooks. The call for waste paper, cardboard and tin foil during World War II alarmed Brannon. “Now that we have an emergency and are told to bundle old paper and cardboard,” Brannon wrote, “we are in a fair way to lose something good.”<sup>36</sup> Just two weeks later, Brannon reported on an early Alabama collection that had just arrived at ADAH via a

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<sup>32</sup> Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-17.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> Judith M. Wellman, “Local Historians and Their Activities,” in *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, ed. Carol Kammen (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 46-58.

<sup>36</sup> Brannon, “Make Haste Slowly,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 8, 1942. See also Brannon, “Old Manuscripts,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 22, 1939; Brannon, “Old Letters,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 22, 1942; Brannon, “Scrapbooks,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 2, 1945.

reader who was discouraged from burning the papers after having read his column.<sup>37</sup> He also used the column as publicity for ADAH's exhibits, reference services, and various outreach programs.<sup>38</sup>

Other factors played a part in the timing of the column's appearance. Joseph Grégoire de Roulhac Hamilton, was a southern historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During the 1910s-1930s, Hamilton traveled throughout the South collecting family papers, plantation records and other historical material for the newly-created Southern Collection at UNC.<sup>39</sup> The threat of potentially losing records to other state institutions caused Marie Bankhead Owen to put calls out to local newspapers to ask that ADAH, not UNC, be considered the repository of the reader's material.<sup>40</sup> The outside collecting was also detrimental to the momentum Owen had built for the push to construct a permanent home for ADAH. From the organization's creation in 1901 until 1940, ADAH was housed in the State Capitol. Through New Deal legislation and the powerful Bankhead name funding was secured and the new World War Memorial Building opened on Veterans Day 1940.<sup>41</sup>

## Sources

In his columns, Brannon used both primary-source research and quoted extensively from the work of other historians. In a 1932 letter to Marie Owen, Brannon wrote that he "never

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<sup>37</sup> Brannon, "Old Letters," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 22, 1942.

<sup>38</sup> Brannon, "Original Department of Archives and History," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 26, 1940; Brannon, "Traveling About," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 13, 1941.

<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Adams, "The Accidental Archivist: J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton and the Creation of the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Unknown author, "Alabama Needs All Historical Treasures Her People Now Have," *Anniston Star*, July 15, 1930.

<sup>41</sup> Jakeman, 36-65.

claimed . . . to be the first-hand authority” and that he always tried to create a “readable story.”<sup>42</sup> This is not to understate Brannon’s efforts, but to highlight his desire to inform the general reader of sources---eighteenth century diaries, travel accounts, and law books---that describe and depict early Alabama history. He was careful to cite his sources with the text. Brannon’s extensive writings on the Federal Road, a trading route through central Georgia to lower Alabama that became a postal route formed in 1811 during President Jefferson’s administration, and then a military road during Jackson’s tenure, is one example of how he informed the general public about Alabama’s role in shaping U.S. history.<sup>43</sup>

He typically wrote on Sundays with the column published the following Sunday.<sup>44</sup> If topics were duplicated, each column was unique in its content. The columns were rather lengthy. Of the typed, double-space drafts that are available, the majority are five or more pages in length. One version has “to be edited” written in pen at the top-right corner, signaling either for Brannon himself to edit, one of his secretaries, or possibly, for the newspapers editors. As Brannon’s job responsibilities grew, so too did the column’s length.

Brannon, like many antiquarians at the time, was a collector of all things. His collecting habits tied in closely with his curatorial work at ADAH. He wrote several columns on various collectors throughout the state detailing their collections, how they got started and how they acquired their pieces. A recent newsletter from the *Bottle and Extra*, a national publication for

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<sup>42</sup> Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>43</sup> Southerland and Brown, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files.

bottle collecting, labelled Brannon as Alabama's "great-grandfather of bottle collecting" due to his many writings pertaining to the subject.<sup>45</sup>

He wrote his pieces using material from his private collection and from sources available at ADAH. "I have much of the original source material in my own collection," Brannon wrote in 1932, "and digging it out in my own way always pleases me."<sup>46</sup> In one column, Brannon wrote "I have attempted to get material not general[y] available and previously published, to add something new, and to dig out something which has been tucked away, previously recorded but never since mentioned."<sup>47</sup> In a particular column on the history of the U.S. census, Brannon reminisced that his interest in the subject began when he received his grandfather's commission certificate as a census taker in 1880.<sup>48</sup> The commission started his collecting spree and would go on to include rare books on Alabama history, works written by native authors, bottles, postage stamps, U.S. Official Registers, picture cards, folk sayings, tombstone inscriptions, and a variety of other material.<sup>49</sup>

"In my stories," Brannon wrote, "I am giving old accounts using Acts, Codes and source material, and frequently I correspond at length to compile my material."<sup>50</sup> In writing a history of Pinchoma Creek in Montgomery County, Brannon detailed the purpose of tract books and land

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<sup>45</sup> Tom Lines, "Alabama Bottle Collecting Spans More Than 75 Years," *Bottles and Extras* (January-February 2012): 24, accessed October 25, 2017, <http://www.fohbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/AlabamaBottleCollecting.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>47</sup> Brannon, "Fan Letters," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 21, 1937.

<sup>48</sup> Brannon, "Takin' The Census," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 16, 1940.

<sup>49</sup> Brannon, "Names From My Steamboat Collection," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 1, 1932.

<sup>50</sup> Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files.

entries, and by doing so was explaining the types of records available to examine the past.<sup>51</sup> Several times he incorporated advertisements as a mean to examine town histories and material culture. The types of advertising covered varied from city directories to store signs. Using 1830s newspapers, Brannon wrote a piece on early Alabama schools, based heavily on the advertisements.<sup>52</sup> He used runaway slave advertisements from the *Alabama Journal* to “demonstrate an entirely different psychological viewpoint from the present day.”<sup>53</sup> He went on to mention that slave sales records were highly sought after by collectors in the “North and East.”<sup>54</sup>

Informing everyday readers about primary sources, their uses and where to find them, were important features Brannon included in his quest to inform the reader about Alabama history. He branched away from a standard narrative to a systematic, scientific method approach that had come in to use by professional historians. On the other hand, Brannon kept his stories simple and was aware that using a bibliography in the *Advertiser* “would be out of place as it is obviously a purely popular story.”<sup>55</sup> He added, “I try to make a readable story and not an encyclopedic statement which would be proper if I was intending to compile a reference article.”<sup>56</sup> Simply put, Brannon was writing to captivate, yet he mirrored the emerging trends of documentation and citation.

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<sup>51</sup> Brannon, “Near the Forks of Pinchoma,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 4, 1937.

<sup>52</sup> Brannon, “Some Old Alabama Schools,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November, 25, 1934.

<sup>53</sup> Brannon, “Runaways’ Names,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 1, 1935.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Brannon to Marie Bankhead Owen, March 8, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Brannon drew much from Alabama's earliest gentleman historians. By doing so, he was informing the general public of the "gentleman scholars" who wrote local Alabama history before him. Brannon, in many ways, resembled these historians and could be considered the last of their kind. He differs from them too, particularly because he never wrote a county history, nor a full-length comprehensive history of the state. Albert J. Pickett, a native of North Carolina who settled in Alabama in the early nineteenth century, is considered to be the state's first historian. Pickett's *History of Alabama* was published in 1851.<sup>57</sup> Like other state historians at the time, he was a lawyer by profession. T.H. Ball's and Henry Halbert's history of the Creek War of 1813-1814 is still in publication today.<sup>58</sup> Halbert, who worked at ADAH from 1906 to 1916, was an authority on the Choctaw people and their language.<sup>59</sup> Thomas S. Woodward's letters to his old friend "Horse Shoe Ned"—Edward Harris—are some of the earliest accounts of Alabama, particularly Montgomery County. In 1939, Brannon wrote the forward and indexed the 1859 republication of *Woodward's Reminiscences*.<sup>60</sup>

## Topics

The topics covered in Brannon's weekly column varied. Rarely did a column's subjects resemble the previous week's subject. For example, during a three-week span in 1937, Brannon covered early Montgomery prints and illustrations, travel along the historic Three Notch Road in

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<sup>57</sup> Albert J. Pickett, *History of Alabama, and incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the earliest period* (Charleston, SC: Walker and James, 1851).

<sup>58</sup> H.S. Halbert and T.H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895). For more on Ball, see Brannon, "The Alabama Department of Archives and History," 7-8 and Harvey H. Jackson III, "T. H. Ball: The Best Alabama Historian You Never Read," *Alabama Review* 58, no. 3 (July 2005): 163-175.

<sup>59</sup> Brannon, "Notasulga," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 18, 1938.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas S. Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians, Contained in Letters to Friends in Georgia and Alabama*, 1859, Reprint with forward by Peter Brannon (Tuscaloosa: Alabama Book Store, 1939); Brannon, "Thomas S. Woodward, Pioneer," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 8, 1931.

south Alabama, and a history of cornbread.<sup>61</sup> The randomness can be partly attributed to the research and reference requests he was answering as part of job duties. He also wrote on subjects made topical by current events. His initial 1931 column was written in observation of the 117<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Andrew Jackson's defeat of the Red Sticks at the Battle of the Horseshoe Bend that signaled "the turning point of [Jackson's] career which made him immortal in the eyes of many Americans."<sup>62</sup> When the Court Street Methodist Church was removed in downtown Montgomery in 1931, Brannon wrote a piece on its history and its preachers.<sup>63</sup> A piece he wrote on early Alabama druggists in 1937 was an "elaboration" of a talk he gave to the Alabama Pharmaceutical Association a week earlier.<sup>64</sup> As fall weather emerged in 1935, Brannon reminisced on his earliest memories of "hog-killin' time."<sup>65</sup>

Yet, the variety of topics allow for an examination of the broader trends, particularly surrounding historical writing and historical memory. The development of the automobile signaled the end of the steamboat's heyday. Brannon covered Alabama's steamboat history extensively in his writings. Brannon's personal papers are filled with receipts, images, travel logs and map detailing Alabama's steamboat history.<sup>66</sup> Historian Harvey Jackson said it best when he commented on Brannon's pieces related to Alabama steamboat history and river lore:

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<sup>61</sup> Brannon, "Montgomery Prints," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 5, 1937; Brannon, "The Three Notch Road," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 12, 1937; Brannon, "Corn Bread," *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 19, 1937. See also Curtis Thomasson, "Three Notch Road is historically popular in South Alabama," *The Andalusia Star-News*, November 6, 2010, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.andalusiarnews.com/2010/11/06/three-notch-road-is-historically-popular-in-south-alabama/>.

<sup>62</sup> Brannon, "Andrew Jackson on the Coosa," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 26, 1931.

<sup>63</sup> Brannon, "Court Street and Some of its Preachers," *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 16, 1931.

<sup>64</sup> Brannon, "Our Early Drug Business," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 27, 1937.

<sup>65</sup> Brannon, "Hog Killing Time," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 17, 1935.

<sup>66</sup> Brannon, "Names From My Steamboat Collection," *Montgomery Advertiser*, May 1, 1932; Brannon, "Disasters On The Chattahoochee," *Montgomery Advertiser*, July 21, 1935; Brannon, "Steamboat Landing," *Montgomery*



Leading the mourners was Peter Brannon of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, who in the 1930s and 1940s often eulogized the end of that golden age in his *Montgomery Advertiser* column, 'Through the Years.' Saddened that they were Montgomerians 'who had never heard a Steamboat whistle,' Brannon resurrected stories and revived memories of the river as they once had been through tales of steamboat landings, dead towns, brave captains, floating palaces, and burning wrecks. At that critical juncture, when so much was changing, Peter Brannon kept interest alive and in the process helped preserve river lore that might otherwise have been lost.<sup>67</sup>

Jackson's words can be applied to Brannon's writings as a whole. Nostalgia, traditions, and worry that the younger generations were not as interested, and reminiscing were key factors in his decision to write.<sup>68</sup>

The rise of the American city and the growth of urban areas left many once prominent towns in decay. Dead towns appealed to Brannon's "Through the Years" readers and were frequently the subject of request for information. He wrote a series of columns in 1941 that featured Cahawba, the old capitals of Jackson County, Erie, Triana, and Blakeley.<sup>69</sup> Following the initial five-part series Brannon published an additional piece covering towns that were mentioned to him by readers.<sup>70</sup> Brannon was able to captivate his audiences by reminding readers of what once was and how things had changed. For example, Brannon cited an

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*Advertiser*, February 7, 1937; Brannon, "Old Steamboat Days," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 21, 1937; Brannon, "Sunday, Feb. 28, 1853," *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 27, 1942; Brannon, "The Burning of the Eliza Battle," *Montgomery Advertiser*, September 19, 1943; Brannon, "Luxurious Steamboats Plied Alabama River Before 1900," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 2, 1949.

<sup>67</sup> Harvey H. Jackson III, *Rivers of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 241. Steamboats and early transportation in Alabama are topics that have yet to be researched in-depth.

<sup>68</sup> Brannon, "Writing Local History, A Story of Triana," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 11, 1946.

<sup>69</sup> Brannon, "Cahawba, Deserted Towns Number One," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 9, 1941; "Dead Towns, Number Two, Washington," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 16, 1941; "The Old Capitals of Jackson," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 2, 1941; "Old Erie," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 9, 1941.

<sup>70</sup> Brannon, "Dead Towns," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 16, 1941.

article from the October 7, 1817 issue of the *Huntsville Republican* in his article on Blakeley.<sup>71</sup> By highlighting the fact that at the time Mobile and Blakely were comparable in size and competition, Brannon gave the reader a somewhat visual reminder of just how far a place like Mobile has come since its beginnings.

Cemeteries at this time became “shrines” to local history.<sup>72</sup> Throughout Brannon’s columns, especially those relating to particular towns, were references to cemeteries, the individuals buried there, and the unique “folk art” gravestones that he found on his many journeys. “The small rural church yards,” Brannon wrote, “hold the dust of many of those who made our country.” Grave markers, Brannon wrote in 1941, “perpetuate the memory of our departed.”<sup>73</sup> Cemetery research ties in with the genealogy surge of the 1930s. Folklore and superstitions were interconnected as well and became interested to many through the work being done by the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s.<sup>74</sup>

The study of place names was a topic Brannon frequented in his columns, and one that was frequently requested by his readers. In a column detailing various place names, he wrote that at an early age his grandfather paid him five dollars after he recited, and properly pronounced, all the countries of South America.<sup>75</sup> The columns detailing place names were often popular and

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<sup>71</sup> Brannon, “Old Blakeley,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 25, 1935.

<sup>72</sup> M. Kammen, 274.

<sup>73</sup> Brannon, “County Church Yards,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 21, 1941.

<sup>74</sup> M. Kammen, 421, 427.

<sup>75</sup> Brannon, “Other Old Names,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 18, 1935; Brannon, “The Origin of Certain Words,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December, 5, 1943; and Brannon, “Land,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 17, 1944. Vernon Knight Jr. wrote that Brannon’s research on historic Indians towns in Alabama is “sketchy” when compared to other published sources. See Vernon J. Knight Jr., “Foreword,” in *Historic Indian Towns in Alabama, 1540-1838* by Amos J. Wright Jr. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), xi-xv.

frequently requested.<sup>76</sup> The interest in learning place names could tie in with the strong sense of nostalgia that developed during the inter-war years. As opposed to national pride, strong state and local traditions were remembered and developed during the early twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> To borrow from Michael Kammen, “Pride of place played a critical role as a stimulus for the most particular manifestations of memory and tradition.”<sup>78</sup>

### **Gauging the Reader (Historians & General Public)**

“Readers should remember,” Brannon wrote in 1937, “that I have to work for a living, writing for the papers brings no income.”<sup>79</sup> Brannon frequently mentioned in the forewords that readers often wrote to him requesting topics to cover or to note an inaccuracy in a previous issue. An indication of the number of requests can be found in one of his columns from 1937 titled “Fan Letters”:

“I do wish that those who want me to do a half-a-week’s work for them, would at least furnish me with a stamp for reply. When I can accommodate, I eventually get around to that point and make the effort to do so, but I still am convinced that it would please me if a few of my ‘public’ would say ‘thank you’ for the favors they demand.”<sup>80</sup>

Two years later in his report to the Board of Trustees Brannon wrote that if all the reference requests addressed to him were answered he “could not possibly devote any time or attention to any other duties.”<sup>81</sup> Even so, Brannon’s correspondence files are voluminous. Throughout the

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<sup>76</sup> Brannon, “More Indian Names,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 6, 1932; Brannon, “Other Old Names,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 18, 1935.

<sup>77</sup> M. Kammen, 274, 277.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>79</sup> Brannon, “Fan Letters,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 21, 1937.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> “Report of Peter A. Brannon, Curator, Covering Activities from October 1, 1938 Through September 30, 1939,” ADAH Administrative Files (SG17916).

records are letters written to him that mention his columns. The correspondence files indicate that the columns were read statewide and copies were frequently requested. Brannon's personal and administrative papers are filled with letters from university historians and graduate students from across the U.S.—including Harvard—asking for sources and references.

They also highlight how Brannon reached out to those in specific communities regarding local history. Some ask for further guidance, some wrote to simply say thank you. Others had heard through family and friends of the columns and wrote to Brannon requesting copies. Some wrote to express disappointment like one gentleman who wrote that he was “disappointed” that the town of Dayton in Marengo County was not included in a recent piece on “a dozen oldest towns in Alabama.”<sup>82</sup> This particular letter introduces another importance to Brannon's correspondence with his intended audience, future subjects.

Throughout his career, he constantly received phone calls and letters asking for information relating to state and local history. Brannon “could give the answer off the top of his head; when he couldn't, the answer was shortly forthcoming,” noted one newspaper's editor.<sup>83</sup> The columns were a learning tool for Brannon. Brannon's correspondence also highlights the fact that his readers provided him with an array of topics. One example comes from his correspondence with J.R. Rutland, an English professor at Auburn, who wrote mainly to introduce a student of his who was come to ADAH to conduct research. He closed his letter with “I am enjoying the Sunday articles” and suggested looking into Tyrone Power's 1835 account of Alabama.<sup>84</sup> Later, Rutland sent Brannon a copy of the Irish actor's writings and Brannon wrote a

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<sup>82</sup> J.M. Creek (sp?) to Brannon, May 15, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

<sup>83</sup> Unknown author, “Dr. Peter Brannon,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 9, 1967, Surname Files.

<sup>84</sup> J.R. Rutland to Brannon, June 24, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

column on Power's writings a few months later.<sup>85</sup> Advertisements and downtown Montgomery storefronts were other topics Brannon frequently wrote on, oftentimes due to information provided to him by others. In 1933, Lamar Lowe wrote to Brannon addressing several storefront displays he remembered as a child. One in particular, a drugstore that featured a large mortar and pestle "with a negro standing on the side turning the pestle in the mortar with both hands (still motion)."<sup>86</sup>

Several of the readers mentioned that they saved the articles for future use. Mrs. M.M. Walker wrote in 1932 that she was a weekly reader and was "preserving them for future reference."<sup>87</sup> Joel D. Jones wrote in 1932 that he himself was writing a local history column for his county paper and that he enjoyed reading Brannon's columns so much that "clip[ped] them out and put them in a scrap book."<sup>88</sup> One reader wrote that he had "not been . . . in alignment" with the paper and had dropped his subscription only to renew because he missed Brannon's columns.<sup>89</sup> Occasionally, copies were lent to friends and never returned as is the case of W.H. Stuart who wrote to Brannon asking for a copy of his column on Ebenezer Church in Stanton, Alabama after his mother-in-law lent it to a Baptist minister and it was never returned.<sup>90</sup> Readers oftentimes clipped the columns and sent them to relatives and friends throughout the state. A Ms. Eva Chandler Gagerson, a native Alabamian, who lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina wrote to

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<sup>85</sup> Brannon, "Tyrone Power in Alabama," *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 16, 1932.

<sup>86</sup> Lamar Howe to Brannon, November 19, 1933, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

<sup>87</sup> M.M. Walker to Brannon, April 13, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

<sup>88</sup> Joel D. Jones to Brannon, July 26, 1932, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

<sup>89</sup> J.(?). Ga..ard to Brannon, February 7, 1934, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

<sup>90</sup> W.H. Stuart to Brannon, March 9, 1950, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16256). The column referenced is "Ebenezer Church," *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 14, 1940.

Brannon in 1937 that her sister had sent her multiple articles and noted, “You have written parts of her [Alabama] history ---The Indians, the old villages, schools, circuit riders, taverns, etc.” Gagerson, a native of Macon and Russell counties, added that she “liked best the articles about our own section ---Macon and Russell, and when I read some of the names you mentioned, I felt as if I had met old friends.”<sup>91</sup> Mrs. H.N. Murdock, a schoolteacher from Coffee Springs, Alabama wrote to Brannon asking for assistance in selecting maps to use as teaching tools for her fourth-grade class’s Alabama history curriculum. She closed her letter saying that she “thoroughly enjoy and appreciate your column and particularly so because it so often coincide[s] with my classroom work.”<sup>92</sup> To sum up, there is no doubt his writing touched the reading public and were popular indeed.

### *Alabama Historical Quarterly*

Brannon’s last publishing venture came during his time as director. With his appointment in 1955 came his dual title as editor of the *Alabama Historical Quarterly* (AHQ). AHQ was in publication from 1930 to 1982, always under the leadership of ADAH. During Brannon’s tenure as editor from 1955 until his death in 1967, both professional and amateur historians were published. Yet scholarship oftentimes took a backseat to narrative histories that featured little interpretation, and oftentimes, the reprinting of primary sources including, historic newspaper accounts of a well-known event, cemetery records, early nineteenth century church registers, and letters and diaries pertaining to the ex-Confederates who fled from the states to Brazil postwar in hopes of resuming their old way of life.<sup>93</sup> The latter half of the 1950s, however, saw a noticeable

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<sup>91</sup> Eva Chandler Gagerson to Brannon, June 27, 1937, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16254).

<sup>92</sup> Mrs. H.N. Murdock to Brannon, October 23, 1933, ADAH Administrative Files (SG16253).

<sup>93</sup> For similar publishing content in other states, see Sarah E. Gardner, “‘History in the Making’: The Early Years of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 101, no. 2 (2017): 102-113.

increase in the number of scholarly articles published per issue. This, perhaps, was a reaction to the brand-new *Alabama Review* that began publication in 1948. Published by the newly-created Alabama Historical Association (AHA) in partnership with the University of Alabama Press, the *Alabama Review* from the onset was a more professional publication in both its selection of pieces written by both trained and untrained historians. One major difference between the two publications was that the *Alabama Review* accepted only never before published material. For example, Brannon's piece on the history of dueling in the state was intended for publication in the *Alabama Review*, yet due to several sections having already been published in local newspapers, he had to resort to *AHQ*.<sup>94</sup> *AHQ*'s increase in scholarly articles, therefore, was perhaps due to the competition created by the *Alabama Review*.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1933 The *Birmingham News—Age-Herald* featured a piece on Brannon's work written by James Saxon Childers, a longtime professor of English at Birmingham-Southern College. Childers wrote on Brannon's work with the burial urns he and other members of the AAS had excavated in central Alabama.<sup>96</sup> "It is too bad that there is not a chair of Alabama History in some educational institution: Peter Brannon could set the boys and girls of this state on fire with his vivid knowledge of Alabama's past." He later wrote, "The greatest living authority on Alabama history is Peter A. Brannon of Montgomery."<sup>97</sup> Since Childers was a colleague of

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<sup>94</sup> Brannon was the editor of *AHQ* at the time of its publication. See Peter A. Brannon, "Dueling in Alabama," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 17 (Fall 1955): 97.

<sup>95</sup> Brannon was a founding member of AHA. See Leah Rawls Atkins, "The Alabama Historical Association: The First Fifty Years," *Alabama Review* 50, no. 4 (October 1997): 243-266.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel J. Mitchell, "James Saxon Childers," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2344>.

<sup>97</sup> James Saxon Childers, "Burial Urns Bare Strange History: Greatest Authority on State's Past Interviewed," *Birmingham News—Age-Herald*, September 24, 1933.

Brannon's, one could note that he was biased, but at the time of Brannon's tenure, many individuals' personal thoughts on Brannon resembled those written by Childers. All indications point that the people of Alabama—the everyday man and woman who enjoyed history as a hobby—valued Brannon's word. While his facts were not always correct, and he had a tendency to overemphasize or, perhaps, embellished a nontrivial statement, his work is important and deserves recognition and is itself a source for modern Alabama historians.

Other than politicians and superstars, one's death is rarely mentioned outside of the obituary section. Brannon's death, however, headlined the front page of the *Montgomery Advertiser* and was covered in newspapers statewide.<sup>98</sup> A close friend of Brannon's wrote that Brannon often said, "Today nobody will be remembered more than three weeks after he is dead."<sup>99</sup> But through his writings, Brannon has been long remembered. His writings are just one of the many factors that played a role in shaping his memorable career. The numerous talks he gave (in one year alone he gave 151 different lectures), the numerous female students he taught Alabama history to at Huntingdon College, the county historical societies he helped to establish, his travels across the state documenting its natural, social, and political history, and the valuable archival material and artifact collections he was responsible acquiring were all important elements that define his time at ADAH. His writings, and tenure as editor, were arguably shaped by many of these activities and teachings. His columns brought history to the people.

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<sup>98</sup> Unknown author, "Dr. Brannon of Archives Dies At 84," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 6, 1967.

<sup>99</sup> Ward, 1.



## Appendix 1: Additions to William Stanley Hoole's Compilation

### The Auk (Journal of the American Ornithological Society)

Brannon, Peter A. "The Starling in Montgomery, Alabama." 35, no. 2 (April 1918): 224.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Notes on Some Shore Birds of the Alabama River, Montgomery County, Ala." 37, no. 1 (January 1920): 127-128.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Another Occurrence of a Starling near Montgomery, Ala." 37, no. 2 (April 1920): 298.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Purple Grackle at Albany, Georgia." 37, no. 3 (July 1920): 454.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Notes on Alabama Birds," 38, no. 3 (July 1921): 463-464.

\_\_\_\_\_. "An Usual Dove's Nest." 38, no. 4 (October 1921): 601.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Blue Jay Feeding on Pecans." 38, no. 4 (October 1921): 603-604.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Pelicans in the Interior of Alabama." 39, no. 3 (July 1922): 411.

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\_\_\_\_\_. "Urn-Burial in Central Alabama." *American Antiquity* 3, no. 3 (January 1938): 228-235.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Pensacola Indian Trade." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (July 1952): 1-15.

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