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William Stanley Hoole: Scholar-Librarian

John Jackson

When librarian William Stanley Hoole retired from the University of Alabama in 1973, he left a legacy of achievement worthy of consideration among librarianship's most capable pioneers. In twenty-nine years at the institution, Hoole improved the university's library service and holdings and won intellectual acclaim for the school through his numerous publications covering a wide range of topics. He addressed an organizational problem within the archival collection that resulted in the creation of a separate wing boasting his name today, the William Stanley Hoole Special Collections Library (WSHSCL). Capitalizing on the freedom of retirement, he moved from one stage of a prolific publishing career to another, producing works from his own Confederate Publishing Company.

Hoole aptly demonstrated his diverse writing interests in publications that ranged from the comedic treatment, such as *Sam Slick in Texas*,¹ to the more serious call in articles, speeches, and a widely printed newspaper exposé to examine the American educational system. Ever expanding the purpose

¹ Martha Dubose Hoole, *William Stanley Hoole: Student, Teacher, Librarian, Author* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 2001), 63.
of the educator, Hoole sought to enlighten the community in which he lived, as well as the university coterie in which he taught. This unique feature of Hoole’s life is witnessed in the local radio shows and reading classes he taught in addition to the usual duties that bind most librarians and teachers. Hoole’s story is one of boundless energy and dedication to both profession and humanity.

A resolution passed by the University of Alabama in May 1973 noted the numerous contributions made by Hoole during his long tenure at the school. Library holdings increased from 235,000 volumes in 1944 to 1,400,000 cataloged items in 1973. Personnel increased from 26 to 137, while expenditures rose from $108,000 per year to $1,500,000. In 1973 the WSHSCL contained more than 8,000,000 manuscripts, a rare book room holding more than 6,500 items, and the Alabama Room with more than 28,000 pieces of memorabilia.  

The WSHSCL has grown to include a manuscript collection of approximately 8,500 linear feet and about 10,000,000 items. The University of Alabama archival collection consists of items from the Civil War period, while manuscripts on business and industry, agriculture, religion, folklore, social life, and politics supplement the collection. Accompanying the manuscripts are rare books, some dating to 1485, including first editions of books by Sir Walter Scott and Confederate imprints. The Alabama Collection is a comprehensive assemblage of books by Alabamians, about Alabama, and/or published in Alabama. All University of Alabama Press publications are included, along with all theses and dissertations completed at the university. Numerous family records provide valuable local histories, and census records offer indispensable primary documentation for researchers. Materials devoted to Alabama history are complemented by extensive map and newspaper collections. The maps document early Alabama, the southeastern region, and Civil War history, although a 1585 Ortelius Theatre de l’Univers (Map of the World) is also preserved.  

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3 W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library (hereafter cited as WSHSCL), Report of Holdings (December 2003).
Though Hoole's legacy is most conspicuous in the special collections he inaugurated at Alabama, his gift to the institution and to academia in general is difficult to calculate, due in large part to the immense scholarly endeavor and educational vision that permeated his life's work. Clark Center, former Hoole colleague and current curator of the WSHSCL, asserts that Hoole was "one of the last scholar-librarians." As author and editor of more than 50 books, 100 essays in both popular and scholarly journals, and approximately 500 book reviews in magazines and newspapers, Hoole clearly established his long-held belief that the librarian is much more than a custodian of books.

"The True End of Knowledge," a speech he often delivered, revealed Hoole's conviction to the educational opportunities afforded librarians in their relationships with patrons. This philosophy was exemplified best in an October 1957 Birmingham News article:

Up to now the library profession has put great stress upon acquiring materials and upon organizing them for their smooth flow into the hands of our patrons. But the time has come, or so it seems to me, for us to realize that these practices, however important, are but means to an end. The end itself, we must know, is wisely interpreting these materials for the hosts of men, women, and children who[,] now more than ever, come within our care, providing them proper guidance to the vast store of recorded knowledge which is our rightful province. Surely our success in helping them survive their many ordeals, in making them better citizens of the world we must all inhabit, may be measured in terms of our ability to translate into dynamic force the best

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4 Clark Center (curator, WSHSCL, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa), interview by John Jackson, Tuscaloosa, November 11, 2003.

5 William Stanley Hoole Papers, WSHSCL, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Included in the William Stanley Hoole Papers are untitled speeches, notes kept by Hoole on library projects he headed at the University of Alabama, photographs, and brief correspondence with his colleagues which took the form of letters, postcards, and memos.
that has been thought and said in the past and found only in our workshops. Therein lies the real, the only solid foundation for the Library and Its Future.⁶

Hoole's love of literature, and more importantly his quest for knowledge, began in his hometown of Darlington, South Carolina. He was born May 16, 1903, to William Brunson and Minnie Eva Powers Hoole. His earliest inspiration to become an educator may well have been his father, a local druggist whom Hoole described as "smart as a whip, a sort of town oracle."⁷ The young South Carolinian excelled in school as an athlete and student of letters, both of which he applied in a successful collegiate career at Wofford College in Spartanburg. Though initially distracted by athletics and social life, he recovered enough by his senior year to become a very promising student. Among other honors, he served as president, vice president, critic, censor, and recording secretary of the Calhoun Literary Society; manager of the student newspaper; and secretary of the student body.⁸

In the fall of 1924 Hoole embarked on a short-lived career as a high school teacher in Spartanburg. Although successful, he left after one year to become a salesman for the Montgomery-Crawford Company, a wholesale cotton mill supply house also located in Spartanburg. Within a year, he was promoted to salesman for the upper South Carolina and western North Carolina area, but by 1926 he resigned to accept a better-paying position with Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Charlotte, North Carolina.⁹ Disgusted with the petty maneuverings he encountered in the business world, Hoole was delighted to return to the classroom in 1927, this time teaching

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⁸ Martha Dubose Hoole, William Stanley Hoole, 7.

⁹ Ibid., 8-9.
English and directing athletics at St. John’s Academy in Darlington. 10

The lessons learned at Montgomery-Crawford and Goodyear also prompted Hoole to renew his studies in an effort to prepare himself for a life in academia. He attended South Carolina schools, Columbia University and Wofford College, obtaining a master’s degree from Wofford in English during the summer of 1931. 11 Hoole married Martha Anne Sanders, a mathematics teacher at St. John’s, that same year. The Hoole family grew with the birth of Martha Dubose in 1935 and Elizabeth Stanley in 1945, after the family had moved to Tuscaloosa. 12 In 1931 Hoole continued his education at Duke University, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation, “The Literary and Cultural Background of Charleston, 1830-1860.” To make ends meet, he was able to serve as a graduate teaching fellow in the English department until completion of the degree in 1934. 13 “Seldom have I been happier than I was in that first school year, 1927-1928,” Hoole professed. “I was a fish in water again.” 14

Upon graduating from Duke, Hoole accepted a summer position as an assistant professor of English at Alabama State Teachers College in Jacksonville and then continued the family’s move into the Deep South by accepting a faculty position in the English department at Birmingham-Southern College. There Hoole gained his first experience as a librarian in the spring of 1935. The college received a grant from the Carnegie Corporation for $25,000, earmarked for the purchase and distribution of books, and an additional compensation that awarded Hoole the title professor of books and director of the M. Paul Phillips Library. Hoole subsequently attended summer sessions of the University of Chicago’s Graduate Library School

10 William Stanley Hoole, According to Hoole, 17.

11 Martha Dubose Hoole, William Stanley Hoole, 7.

12 Ibid.


14 W. Stanley Hoole, According to Hoole, 21.
to gain the technical training needed to adequately manage
the growing book collection. The scholar and librarian had thus
begun to merge. As professor of books, Hoole's duties ranged
from purchasing books to creating bibliographies and serving
as liaison between faculty and students. He also taught History
of Books, as well as Reading for Profit, Pleasure, and Recrea-
tion, which were designed to stimulate reading among stu-
dents and faculty. Hoole drew inspiration from these programs
and continued to employ similar strategies later in his career at
other institutions.

In 1937 Hoole and his family moved farther west, where
he secured positions in two Texas schools. For two years, the
scholar-librarian worked to improve the Baylor University Li-
brary, adding at least 9,000 books. By the fall of 1939 Hoole
was on the move again to North Texas State Teachers College,
where he administered the Department of Library Science and
taught courses in the philosophy of reading and the philosophy
of librarianship. He supervised an expansion program that in-
cluded the addition of nearly 14,000 volumes in his first year
alone. For the first time, Hoole incorporated an organizational
strategy that set him apart as an innovative administrator. To
increase efficiency, he compartmentalized library services by
creating autonomous departments, including staff, bindery, and
service. Reorganization among the departments included the
main library, a music library, a demonstration school library,
a teacher-training library, and a historical museum library. The
rearrangement paid great dividends for the college and for Hoole.
By 1940 North Texas State maintained the third largest college
library in the state and one of the ten largest teachers college
libraries in the United States. It emerged as the largest teachers
college library in Texas, with no other school numerically close
to the holdings acquired by Hoole. Beyond the traditional book
collection, Hoole initiated collections of glass slides and micro-
film, as well as maps and pamphlets. As the crowning achieve-
ment, the Denton County Historical Collection was established,
along with a rare book room.

15 Martha Dubose Hoole, William Stanley Hoole, 11.
16 Ibid., 15.
17 Ibid., 16.
The strides made in Texas brought nationwide attention to Hoole's administrative skills. In 1944 he was offered similar positions at several schools, including the University of Florida; the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia; and the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) located in Auburn. Instead, Hoole decided to move back to Alabama as director of libraries at the University of Alabama, where he immediately faced an organizational nightmare. He found a library system in place that had evolved irregularly over several decades. There were six libraries (main library, business, chemistry, education, law, and medicine) that operated autonomously, creating their own budgets, purchasing materials, and operating under unique cataloging procedures. Only the main library fell under the auspices of the director of libraries. The chaotic situation was made worse by the fact that the professional library staff lacked specialized training and held no academic rank.18

In a move similar to that made years earlier at North Texas State, Hoole aggressively attacked the organizational problems that plagued the University of Alabama's library system. Within two years, he had completely reorganized the system, creating a more efficient and cost-effective unit. Among the changes made were the centralization of processing and cataloging, campus-wide library budgeting, and the establishment of academic ranking for salaried professionals. The academic and managerial improvements made over the next decade were phenomenal. In that time, Hoole transformed a statewide institution that lacked centralized guidance into an efficient system that benefited both students and faculty. Not only did the libraries and staff improve markedly, the physical infrastructure that Hoole established served the institution until his retirement and beyond. The book collection doubled in size in conjunction with an assembly of non-book materials, the College of Education Library was built, the College of Engineering Library was established, a library was organized at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and all existing libraries were renovated and air-conditioned.19

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18 Gregory, 80.

19 William Stanley Hoole Papers.
Throughout the 1960s Hoole labored to perfect the university's library administration, but as the North Alabama and Birmingham campuses grew more independent, the centralization projects begun in 1944 became less effective. Ever vigilant to improve the value of the libraries' collections, Hoole made the sacrifice of relinquishing control in certain areas as a means of better providing for library patrons. For example, the university's center in Montgomery was transferred to Auburn University, the Dothan and Mobile extension centers were closed, and the Birmingham and Huntsville campuses were given full autonomy. The Tuscaloosa campus saw a $2.7 million addition to the Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library that increased seating at the main facility by nearly 800, with additional carrels and faculty study rooms. In a two-year project, the Tuscaloosa holdings were reclassed from the Dewey Decimal System to that of the Library of Congress. For his efforts, Hoole was named dean of the libraries in 1969, a positional first for the school.

Among Hoole's major projects while at Alabama was the establishment of an archives and special collections, in order to make the myriad documents pertaining to the university and the state available to the public. As early as 1891 trustees had requested a suitable facility for a museum and space for the Alabama Historical Society's library and archives, but it was not until 1938 that the university began to spend a substantial sum on personal collections. That year the university bought the T. P. Thompson Collection, which contained materials on Louisiana and the Old Southwest. However, when Hoole arrived on campus, he found the papers unprocessed. He quickly began the arrangement and description process on the first of many collections that now fill the William Stanley Hoole Special Collections. In June 1977 the Crimson-White, the university newspaper, announced that the special collections division of the Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library would be named in honor of Hoole that fall. The collection had grown to 10,000,000 items, including manuscripts, letters, diaries, photographs, jour-

20 Gregory, 82.


22 Gregory, 81.
nals, maps, pamphlets, broadsides, and other non-book items. Much of the collection's growth can be attributed to donations and gifts, such as the Wade Hall Collection of Southern History and Culture, a continuing gift from Union Springs, Alabama, author Wade Hall, professor of literature at Bellermine College in Louisville, Kentucky. Included are books, sheet music, sound recordings, and photographs that reflect the culture of the South. Even more telling of Hoole’s collection savvy was the assemblage of over 15,000 rare and unique books.23

Hoole published books, journal articles, and newspaper columns throughout his career. The decade of the 1960s was no different. Hoole satisfied his appetite for southern history with several publications that charted the activity of Confederate soldiers and sailors during the Civil War. Contributing to the *Confederate Centennial Studies* series, Hoole edited two volumes, including *Lawley Covers the Confederacy* (1964) and *Alabama Tories: The First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A., 1862-1865*, published four years earlier. In *Lawley*, Hoole tracked the correspondence of Francis Charles Lawley, writer for the *London Times*, as he followed Robert E. Lee’s campaigns. The First Alabama Cavalry, a Federal military unit drawn from Unionists among the residents of North Alabama, was the topic of *Alabama Tories*, number 16 in the *Confederate Centennial* series. Hoole included an interesting account of his research in England that led to 1964’s *Four Years in the Confederate Navy: The Career of Captain John Low on the C.S.S. Fingal, Florida, Alabama, Tuscaloosa, and Ajax*, which chronicled Low’s years as a Confederate naval officer.

For most academic administrators, the success enjoyed by Hoole would have marked a very fulfilling career. Nevertheless, Hoole did not resign himself to quietly finish out his term at Alabama. When asked to become an integral part of a new library school forming at Alabama, he did not hesitate. In early summer of 1970 the university received word from Governor Albert Brewer that the state legislature had approved a codicillary appropriation of $266,000 for the establishment of a library school. The conditional grounds for funding centered on guaranteeing the opening of the school by the fall of that same year. Hoole, among others, accepted the challenge and

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23 *Crimson-White (Tuscaloosa, AL)*, June 16, 1977.
opened the doors of the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies in the fall of 1970 with eleven graduate students. Fittingly, Hoole became the first professor of the fledgling school, with four graduate students attending his first class, Library Administration.24 "It [the University of Alabama] has the rare opportunity to profit by nationwide studies of librarianship now in progress, to hold fast the old but basic while grasping the new but necessary, and to merge the two into a solid sensible down-to-earth program for educating librarians," a Tuscaloosa News column proclaimed. The article illustrated the need for the program, both in terms of the prestige it would bring the university and the void it would help fill across the state. "Today, in the state [of Alabama] alone there is a current need for literally hundreds of competent librarians at the school, college, university, public, and special levels. In fact, the shortage of librarians in Alabama may with good reason be compared with the much more publicized shortage of physicians and dentists."25

Hoole's contribution to librarianship can only be half-told through the examination of his administrative contributions. His involvement in community and his prolific career as an author complete the story. As always, Hoole remained the teacher. "Successful teaching is not a matter of methodology. Nor is it merely a matter of erudition. The talent for good teaching consists, also, of an enthusiastic desire for communicating to others those ideas we believe to be ennobling, and of wanting those ideas eternally challenged by the living spark of creative thought."26 In fulfilling his own requirements as an educator, Hoole wrote constantly and spoke at gatherings where anyone with a desire to improve humankind would listen. During the summers while not teaching at Alabama, Hoole traveled far afield to continue his education and improve the profession. He was a visiting lecturer at the University of Illinois Library School (1953 and 1955); a Fulbright Scholar, for which

24 W. Stanley Hoole, "Establishment of Library School at the University of Alabama" (speech, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, November 2, 1974).


26 W. Stanley Hoole, According to Hoole, 11.
he surveyed a number of small college libraries on the British Isles (1956-1957); a research consultant for the United States House of Representatives Sub-Committee on Special Education (1957); a visiting lecturer at the Columbia University School of Library Service (1959); and a lecturer at Syracuse University (1961). 27

When William Stanley Hoole retired from the University of Alabama in 1973, he did not relinquish his position as an educator. Besides publishing prolifically, he continued to speak at commencement exercises and professional association meetings throughout the country. One such speaking engagement at the thirty-sixth annual meeting of the Alabama Historical Association in 1983 led to the publication of Alabama’s Golden Literary Era: A Survey and Selected Bibliography, which examined the state’s literary contribution from 1819 to 1919. Through the Confederate Publishing Company, he offered an outlet to aspiring authors to make their works available to a larger audience. He also utilized the company to facilitate the publication of his own works, many of which centered on historical Alabama. For example, Spanish Explorers in the Southeastern United States, 1527-1561, published in 1987, examined the explorations of the region by De Vaca, De Soto, and De Luna. Spanish Explorers included the legend of Welsh explorer Madog ap Owen Gwynedd, who purportedly landed in Mobile Bay in 1170. Hoole retold Madog’s story by relating the historical attempts to verify or refute the tale.

Throughout the 1980s Hoole edited, wrote, and published a series of books and pamphlets dedicated to Alabama Civil War history as well. Along with daughter Elizabeth Hoole McArthur, he published The Yankee Invasion of West Alabama, March-April, 1865, which chronologically followed the Civil War battles fought at Trion, Tuscaloosa, and Romulus. This account also described the burning of the University of Alabama that took place in April 1864 under the direction of Union Brigadier General John Thomas Croxton. The 1984 archaeological dig that unearthed the remains of the university rotunda destroyed in the attack inspired this work. Moreover, this event led to Hoole’s reprinting several accounts of Confederate infantry units that were formed in Alabama. History of the Fifty-
Third Alabama Volunteer Infantry (Mounted), a reprint of the original manuscript penned by Captain Adam Henry Whetstone, was one such narrative. The military career outlined by Whetstone provided an insider’s view of the hardships of war from the unit’s inception in January 1863 to its surrender in May 1865. Hoole made use of his Confederate Publishing Company to bring this work to life in 1985. The 1986 publication of A Historical Sketch of the Fifth Alabama Infantry Regiment, C.S.A. and the subsequent A Historical Sketch of the Thirty-Sixth Alabama Infantry, 1862-1865, also released in 1986, chronicled the movement of the Alabama regiments and included at least a partial roster of the soldiers involved.

At times during his retirement, Hoole lamented the state in which the world had declined. “Our world has become unlike anything we ever dreamed of—a sort of science-fiction planet—where each of us is computerized and known by a number. Many of our old, familiar guidelines now mislead us. We are stranded in doubt and disbelief.” Yet, while Hoole may have been apprehensive about humankind’s future, he attacked those problems with the same zeal he employed in fashioning world-class libraries or promoting the value of education. Hoole firmly declared: “If conventional religion and innovative technocracy have, indeed, fallen short, then I would choose education as the answer. I mean a proper education, a liberal education that is at once an ornament in our days of prosperity and a sanctuary in adversity, a general education that develops the whole man; a humane education that makes a man happy when he is alone; a virtuous education that serves man, not because he makes machines, but simply because he is a human being.”

The ideals of William Stanley Hoole were pure, his aims true, and his advice sound. Hoole died December 12, 1990, but his spirit of service and education live on in the services provided today by the special collection named in his honor. Many of the present University of Alabama Libraries mission goals are representative of the administrative designs implemented

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28 W. Stanley Hoole, untitled (commencement speech, Dalton Junior College, Dalton, GA, 1982).

29 W. Stanley Hoole, untitled (honors day speech, Francis Marion College, Florence, SC, April 20, 1978).
by Hoole. The promotion of the libraries as research and learning centers follows closely Hoole’s desire to expand the role of the library as a tool for learning, and the sought-after improvement in library management and services reflects the administrative changes made by him as early as the 1940s in developing the University of Alabama library system. Hoole’s work, both as a master of library organization and as a scholar, have not gone unnoticed by colleagues. Lawrence S. Thompson, author and educator at the University of Kentucky, paid the greatest tribute to Hoole in his introduction to the 1973 publication *According to Hoole*. In reference to the long-term effects of Hoole’s career, Thompson said: “At long last successful librarianship is becoming less dependent on the librarian’s knowledge of the outside of the book and the inside of the library than on the outside of the library and the inside of the book.” Thompson also referred to the evidence of Hoole’s talent in the myriad offerings from research libraries across the nation: “As a librarian, Bill Hoole’s ability is universally recognized.”

His guidance as a scholar-librarian beckons those of us in the profession, whether we are archivists or librarians, to remember that, in the end, we are all educators.

**John Jackson** is currently a PhD candidate at Auburn University, focusing on the American Civil War. He teaches world history supplemental instruction at Auburn, as well as various history and ethics courses at local junior colleges. He received his MLS from the University of Alabama and an MA in history from Jacksonville State University in Alabama.

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30 Lawrence S. Thompson, “Preface,” in *According to Hoole.*