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## **Marie Bankhead Owen and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1920-1955**

**Robert J. Jakeman**

March 1920 was a traumatic month for Marie Bankhead Owen. It began with the death of her influential father, Senator John Hollis Bankhead, and it ended with the sudden death of her fifty-three-year-old husband, Thomas McAdory Owen, founding director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH). Then on April 1 she accepted an appointment as the second director of ADAH, a position she held for over three decades. Thus, in the space of one month, Marie Bankhead Owen lost her father and her husband and began a thirty-five year career as director of the Alabama archives.

The archival institution that Marie's husband Tom Owen founded was the first governmental archival agency in the United States. In February 1901 the governor of Alabama signed legislation establishing the department. Within a few years, several other southern states followed Alabama's example. Consequently, as Ernst Posner has observed, "the South preceded other regions of the country in taking constructive action" to improve access to public records "through proper

administrative arrangements based on sound legislation.”<sup>1</sup> In 1904 the American Historical Association passed a unanimous resolution endorsing the “Alabama plan” as the most effective arrangement for the management of state records.<sup>2</sup> Alabama’s status as a small, impoverished, rural southern state that emerged as the leader in the movement to improve the care and preservation of public records was largely the product of Tom’s vision and indefatigable efforts. Unfortunately, when Marie retired in 1955, the agency founded by her husband no longer enjoyed its status as a national archival leader.

The fall of ADAH from archival grace, so to speak, during Marie’s tenure offers today’s archivists a useful case study in the importance of carefully balancing the competing roles of state archival agencies. Victoria Irons Walch has recently argued that modern state archival agencies operate in three arenas of state government: 1) culture and education, 2) administration and management, and 3) information and communication.<sup>3</sup> Archival agencies share responsibilities in each of these arenas with other agencies, but are unique in that they have important responsibilities in all three. Consequently, “state archivists and their staffs face significant challenges in maintaining a . . . balance among” these arenas.<sup>4</sup> Walch argues that the cultural-educational arena—in the form of history—predominated during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Then in the 1930s, the administration-management arena emerged as an increasing number of archival programs began to emphasize the “administrative utility” of managing the records of state government. Finally, the third arena—the information-communication arena—was added to the archival mix during the waning decades of the century.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Reynolds Simpson, “The Origin of State Departments of Archives and History in the South” (PhD dissertation, University of Mississippi, 1971), 155, 225.

<sup>3</sup> Victoria Irons Walch, “State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions,” *American Archivist* 60 (Spring 1997): 133-35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

Although Walch's generalizations have broad validity, it should not be assumed that *all* state archives have only recently accepted responsibilities in all three arenas—that during the first third of the twentieth century state archives operated only in the cultural-educational realm, that the administrative-managerial element did not appear until the middle decades, and that the information-communication component has only lately been added to the mix. One reason that ADAH achieved national prominence under Tom Owen's leadership is that he assumed responsibilities in all three arenas. At the outset of his career at the helm of the Alabama archives, Tom was primarily motivated by cultural-educational concerns that were strongly tinged with Confederate Lost Cause nostalgia, but he grew in office and came to recognize the importance of creating an agency that could play an integral role in state government. For example, in 1912 he declared that ADAH "aspires to be a useful and serviceable public institution." During the twenty years that Tom Owen served as director of the Alabama archives, he persisted in his efforts to "enlarge" his agency's "field of usefulness" in all three of the arenas which Walch has correctly identified as characterizing contemporary state archives.<sup>5</sup>

Tom's widow and his successor as ADAH director seems to have lacked her husband's intuitive understanding that successful archival agencies must operate in multiple arenas of state government. By the end of her first decade as director, it was apparent that the cultural-educational arena dominated Marie's vision for ADAH, to the virtual exclusion of the other two arenas. Consequently, during the 1930s Marie headed off proposals to abolish ADAH and transfer its responsibilities to other departments of state government. These attacks subsided after 1939, but by then ADAH was no longer recognized as one of the nation's leading state archives. Nevertheless, Marie maintained ADAH's status as an independent state agency, and she finally obtained a separate building for the department, thus

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen, "Annual Report to the Board of Trustees," September 30, 1912, SG17912, Records of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter cited as ADAH).

insuring an opportunity for her successors to expand ADAH's mission into all three of Walch's arenas.

In early 1920 Marie could not have imagined that she would soon become the second woman to take charge of a department of state government in Alabama.<sup>6</sup> The youngest daughter in the politically prominent Bankhead family, Marie had traveled to Washington DC to care for her elderly father after he became ill in mid-February, and she was with him when he died on March 1. Senator Bankhead had represented Alabama in Washington for more than three decades, first as a representative and after 1907 as a senator. The death of a man described by the *Montgomery Advertiser* as "the best known and most influential figure in Alabama politics" stunned the state.<sup>7</sup> But the influence of the Bankhead name did not die with Senator Bankhead. The senator's namesake, John Hollis II, a prominent attorney in Birmingham, was elected to the Senate in 1930 where he served until his death in 1946. Another son, William Brockman, had been elected to the House of Representatives in 1916, the beginning of a twenty-four-year political career that culminated in four years as Speaker. In 1917 Will's teenage daughter Tallulah began an acting career in New York, and her flamboyant approach to life in the coming decades added a rather scandalous dimension to the Bankhead name.

Marie also contributed to the prominence of the Bankhead name, but in a way perhaps more fitting for an upper-class southern woman born in 1869. Educated at Ward's Seminary in Nashville, she made a grand tour of Europe after she completed her schooling. In 1893 she married Thomas McAdory Owen, three years her senior and a promising young attorney from Bessemer who had become fascinated with the history of his home state. In 1894 the newlyweds moved to Washington, where Tom took a position as chief clerk of the

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<sup>6</sup> In late 1919 Lorraine B. Bush became the first woman to head an agency of state government in Alabama when she was appointed director of the Alabama Child Welfare Department. See *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 2, 1920, 1, and Mary Martha Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 115-17.

<sup>7</sup> *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 2, 1920, 1.

Division of Post Office Inspectors, an appointment he no doubt obtained through the good offices of his father-in-law, then serving in the House of Representatives. While in Washington Tom rubbed elbows with the nation's first generation of professional historians, the products of Herbert Baxter Adams's seminars at Johns Hopkins University. Tom soon came to understand and appreciate the central role of archives and manuscripts in scientific history, a new approach to historical scholarship based on careful analysis of primary sources.

In 1897 the Owens returned to Alabama, where Tom resumed his law practice and began a campaign to convince the state that it should take responsibility for preservation of its records and the promotion of its history. By 1901 the energetic young lawyer had published a comprehensive bibliography of Alabama history, revived the dormant Alabama Historical Society, and produced an exhaustive four-hundred-page report on the status of archives and manuscripts in Alabama. The report called for the creation of a state agency to assume responsibility for Alabama's archives and to promote an appreciation of the state's history. The legislature complied and created the ADAH, the first state agency of its kind in the nation. Tom was appointed director of the new department, and for the next nineteen years he devoted himself to making it a vital component of the cultural and administrative life of the state.<sup>8</sup>

For her part, Marie fulfilled her obligations to her family as Tom was carving out a place for himself in state government. She supported her husband in his endeavors, raised their

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<sup>8</sup> The chief published sources on Owen's life and career include Robert Reynolds Simpson, "Origin of State Departments of Archives and History in the South"; Robert R. Simpson, "The Origins of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 34 (Summer 1972): 155-70; 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; Mary A. Finch, "Thomas McAdory Owen: Preserver of Alabama History" (master's thesis, Auburn University, 1991); Milo B. Howard Jr., "Thomas McAdory Owen: Alabama's Greatest Bibliographer," *Alabama Review* 28 (January 1975): 3-15; R. D. W. Connor, "Dedication of the Archival Section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building," *American Archivist* 4 (April 1941): 77-83; and Alden Monroe, "Thomas Owen and the Founding of the Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Provenance* 21 (2003): 22-35.

children, and took her turn caring for her niece Tallulah, whose mother had died three weeks after Tallulah was born.<sup>9</sup> Despite her domestic responsibilities, Marie nevertheless found time to pursue her literary interests. From 1910 to 1917 she edited the woman's page and education sections of the *Montgomery Advertiser*. She compiled several installments of Montgomery's social directory and authored eight plays, including six historical dramas to commemorate the 1919 centennial of Alabama statehood.<sup>10</sup> In addition to her social and literary pursuits, Marie became increasingly involved in civic affairs and politics. In 1912, for example, she served as president general of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Southern Commercial Congress. She was chair of the Woman's Democratic League in support of Woodrow Wilson's presidential campaigns in 1912 and 1916.<sup>11</sup> Although active in civic affairs and politics, Marie was, like her father, an outspoken opponent of woman's suffrage. She served as legislative chair of the Woman's Anti-Ratification League of Alabama, formed in June 1919 to oppose the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.<sup>12</sup> Thus by the time she reached her fiftieth birthday on September 1, 1919, Marie Bankhead Owen

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey L. Carrier, *Tallulah Bankhead: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 2; Tallulah Bankhead, *Tallulah: My Autobiography* ([New York]: Harper, 1952), 33-34.

<sup>10</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen, *The Story of Alabama: A History of the State* (New York: Lewis Historical Pub. Co., 1949), 5: 1437; Marie Bankhead Owen, comp., *The Blue Book, Montgomery, Ala., 1909-10* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1909). The plays Owen wrote prior to 1920 include *The Deltan* (Montgomery: n.p., 1908); *The Acting Governor* (Montgomery: n.p., 1913); *The Battle of Maubilla* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1919); *De Soto and the Indians* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1919); *At Old Mobile* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1919); *How Bienville Saved Mobile* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1919); *Alabama, or the Making of a State . . .* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1919); and *How Alabama Became a State* (Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1919).

<sup>11</sup> Owen, *Story of Alabama*, 5:1437.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, *New Woman in Alabama*, 195. See also Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 117, 234, 236; Lee Norcross Allen, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Alabama" (master's thesis, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1949), 126.

was recognized within the state not only as a member of the powerful Bankhead family and the wife of the founder of ADAH, but also as an accomplished author and a public figure in her own right.

The sudden death of her husband must have been a severe blow to Marie, still grieving over the death of her father. Although not a nationally-prominent figure like his father-in-law, Tom was widely known within the state. Despite a recent bout of influenza, he seemed to be recovering his health, which had been in decline since the previous fall. Indeed, the governor had recently appointed him director of a state-wide campaign to raise funds for a national effort to erect a statue in France to commemorate the Battle of the Marne.<sup>13</sup> But shortly before midnight on March 25, he collapsed in his home, dead from heart failure. The following day his photograph accompanied banner headlines on the front page of the *Montgomery Advertiser* that announced “Doctor Thomas M. Owen Expires Suddenly; Prominent Historian and Archives Curator Victim [of] Heart Attack.” The *Advertiser’s* coverage of Owen’s death rivaled that of his father-in-law’s, a clear indication of Owen’s high social and political standing within the state. The extensive article on his life and career noted, without exaggeration, that the “Alabama Department of Archives and History which he established single handed[ly] in 1901 is not only famous throughout the country, but it has served as a model for other States . . . Historians from various sections of the country have visited Montgomery and Alabama to study the methods by which the Alabama History Department [sic] was brought to its state of acknowledged excellence.” In addition to his extensive knowledge of historical matters, the article continued, “Dr. Owen . . . was regarded by his fellow officials at the Capitol as thoroughly versed in all matters relating to the State’s government.” Despite the burden of his extensive professional, civic, and administrative responsibilities, Owen nevertheless “personally impressed most favorably the thousands of visitors who came annually to see his remarkable collection of historical relics at the Capitol.” Consequently, “perhaps no official in Alabama was known personally to so many Alabama people as

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<sup>13</sup> *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 3, 1920, 5.

he.”<sup>14</sup> Echoing the same theme, an editorial entitled “The Builder” appeared the following day and declared that Tom Owen “loomed larger in the estimation of the people of Alabama than any other public official in charge of a department of the State’s government.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite the shock of Owen’s sudden death, speculation about his successor soon appeared in the press. On Monday, March 29, the day after Tom’s funeral, the *Advertiser* reported that “friends of the late Dr. Thos. M. Owen and admirers of the Department of Archives and History which he created and made famous, have spontaneously and unanimously suggested that his widow . . . should be elected by the board of trustees to the directorship.”<sup>16</sup> Later in the week the *Advertiser* editorialized in favor of Marie’s succeeding her husband as director. On April 1, only a week after Tom’s death, the board of trustees met in the governor’s office and elected Marie Bankhead Owen the second director of ADAH.<sup>17</sup> She assumed the directorship at age fifty, stepping down in 1955 when she was eighty-five years of age. Three years after her retirement she passed away in a nursing home. She served as director almost twice as long as her husband in a career that paralleled that of her counterpart in Illinois, Margaret Cross Norton, who served as that state’s archivist from 1922 until 1957.<sup>18</sup>

The department that Marie inherited from her husband was clearly a vital and important state agency. It was the product

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., March 26, 1920, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., March 27, 1920, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., March 29, 1920, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., April 2, 1920, 1.

<sup>18</sup> On Norton’s career, Thornton W. Mitchell, introduction to Margaret Cross Norton, *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton and Archival & Records Management* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1975), xv-xxi; Donnelly Lancaster, “Before Archives: Margaret Cross Norton’s Childhood, Education, and Early Career,” *Provenance* 16 (1998): 93-110; and Donnelly Faye Lancaster, “Margaret Cross Norton: Dedication to the Development of the American Archival Profession” (master’s thesis, Auburn University, 2000).

of Tom's vision and also of his unremitting determination to make his department *useful* both to the state government and to the citizens of Alabama. In his 1910 report to the board of trustees, Owen noted the department's "remarkable growth and enlargement" and confidently declared that "no new department . . . established in the last twenty-five years is so well grounded." He attributed his singular success to "the willingness and desire of the Department to be a useful institution."<sup>19</sup> Two years later he clearly expressed his philosophy of useful service when he told the board that "an institution which serves merely an ornamental or aesthetic purpose *may* live, but . . . an institution serving a useful purpose in a highly refined and complex society has not only the right to live, but [will find] increased opportunity for the enlargement of its field of usefulness."<sup>20</sup> Although the legislation establishing the department gave it a broad mandate for preserving all historical resources and promoting knowledge and research in state history, Owen considered the centerpiece of the department's work—its core mission—the care and preservation of the records of state and local government. In a 1904 presentation at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, Owen had noted that his department was charged with various responsibilities, such as collection of historical materials of all kinds and promoting knowledge and understanding of Alabama history. But most of these responsibilities could be shared with non-governmental organizations with similar interests. A state department of archives and history, however, had one "exclusive duty," a responsibility of "first and supreme importance"—"the care and custody of official archives." Indeed Owen considered this responsibility so obvious a priority that it "hardly admits of question."<sup>21</sup> This, then, was the cornerstone of Tom's vision for his department. He further articulated his understand-

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<sup>19</sup> Annual Report to the Board of Trustees, September 30, 1910, SG 17912, ADAH.

<sup>20</sup> Annual Report to the Board of Trustees, September 30, 1912, SG 17912, ADAH.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen, "State Departments of Archives and History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1904* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 239.

ing of the importance of proper management of the state's records in 1908, when he predicted that the results of his "examination and arrangement" of the archives of state government would bring "to light . . . a vast mass of new information on every subject of importance in the life of the State and its institutions. Where we now have only meagre information concerning the early legislative sessions, the judiciary, the State bank and branches, public lands, schools, the University, the penitentiary, the Capitol, etc., etc., when the record[s] are finally in shape, a mass of materials will be developed which has long since been forgotten."<sup>22</sup>

Despite Owen's clear understanding of the "exclusive duty" of his department for care and custody of state records, he nevertheless had to balance this duty against other responsibilities. At the time it was established, the Department of Archives and History was the only institution in the state with the resources to collect, preserve, and promote Alabama's cultural heritage. The lack of other organizations, both public and private, to take responsibility for cultural assets saddled the department with a broad cultural mandate from the outset. Yet Owen somehow managed to keep these competing missions in balance, never letting the cultural mandate of his agency eclipse its fundamental responsibility for the records of government. As an attorney, a former elected official, and an experienced administrator, he knew that protecting the institutional memory of government by preserving its records had both cultural and administrative facets. And he also recognized that if his department did not take responsibility for the records of government, no other institution would. Equally important, he knew that the agency that managed and preserved the state's records could position itself to play a vital administrative role in state government. For example, in 1907 the state legislature formally enlarged ADAH's responsibilities to include legislative reference work, an acknowledgment of the work done by the department since its establishment. The legislature increased ADAH's appropriation for reference service in 1911. By 1915

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<sup>22</sup> Annual Report to the Board of Trustees, September 30, 1908, SG 17912, ADAH.

the legislative reference collections had expanded to the point that Tom published a forty-one-page guide to the holdings.<sup>23</sup>

Another indication of Tom Owen's success at integrating his department into the framework of state government appears in a 1918 report prepared by Hastings H. Hart, an analyst with the prestigious Russell Sage Foundation. Hart had been commissioned by the governor of Alabama to study the state's social problems and how its agencies were coping with them. Hart relied on the state archives as a key source of information for his research, and he was so impressed with the effectiveness of the Alabama archives that he declared it "one of the most important agencies in state government."<sup>24</sup> Such a ringing endorsement by an experienced analyst from a national research foundation speaks volumes about Tom Owen's understanding of the practical value of records and his ability to keep his agency's administrative and cultural missions in balance. Thus by 1918, Tom had developed a department that took on vital cultural *and* administrative roles that no other institution in the state—public or private—could tackle.

The board of trustees' decision to appoint Marie as her husband's successor seemed to hold much promise. Her supporters described her as "capable, energetic and thoroughly familiar with the routine, the methods and the general work of the department. More than any other person she is qualified by knowledge and training to carry on the work laid down by Dr. Owen."<sup>25</sup> Simply put, her supporters considered Marie the best choice because she knew "the traditions of the Department and spirit given it by Dr. Owen."<sup>26</sup>

Marie took as her first task the completion of Tom's *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, a

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<sup>23</sup> Alabama Department of Archives and History, *Preliminary Index to the Legislative Reference Collections of the Department* (Montgomery: Brown Printing Co., 1914).

<sup>24</sup> Hastings H. Hart, *Social Problems in Alabama: A Study of the Social Institutions and Agencies of the State of Alabama as Related to Its War Activities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1918), 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 1, 1920, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1920, 2.

massive, four-volume reference work that remains an essential tool for the study of Alabama history and stands as a testament to his encyclopedic knowledge of the state.<sup>27</sup> Since the 1890s Tom had aspired to publish a history of Alabama, and he had labored to find collaborators and a publisher for his project. Finding coauthors proved elusive, but in 1911 a publishing company in Chicago, S. J. Clarke, showed interest. The following year the company published Tom's thirty-page prospectus for a two-volume work entitled *A History of Alabama and a Dictionary of Alabama Biography* and forthcoming soon.<sup>28</sup> According to the prospectus, publication was imminent, but Tom suffered from a malady that afflicts many writers—perfectionism. Consequently, the project was still unfinished at the time of his death eight years later. Moreover, it had expanded in scope well beyond the two volumes envisioned in 1912. Unwilling to permit her beloved Tom's life work to remain unrealized, Marie told the publisher that she would complete the project in sixty days. She mobilized the ADAH staff to accomplish the task, but even so it took a year to deliver a completed manuscript to Chicago. Finally, in summer 1921, the four-volume work was published, an impressive reference tool that has yet to be superseded in the scope and breadth of its coverage.

Marie also applied her energies to another task unfinished at Tom's death—the construction of a building to house ADAH collections and staff. This project proved significantly more difficult than completing Tom's *History*. The year before his death, Tom had promoted the idea of honoring Alabama's fallen soldiers in World War I by constructing a "War Memorial Building" that would serve as permanent quarters for ADAH. The legislature created a commission to direct the project, Tom became chairman, and volunteers raised over \$60,000 in pri-

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, 4 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1921). This account of the publication of Owen's *History* is taken from Marie's preface in the original 1921 edition, 1: v-vi, and from Milo B. Howard's introduction to the 1978 reprint edition (Spartanburg, SC.: Reprint Co., 1978), 1: iii-vii.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen, *Announcement and Prospectus of A History of Alabama and A Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1912).

vate funds. The return of peace and Tom's death dampened enthusiasm for the project. Marie persisted, however, and the funds were used to purchase land on the south side of the state Capitol building for the proposed Memorial building. But real progress on the project was delayed until the 1930s.<sup>29</sup>

Other projects occupied Marie's attention during her first decade as director as well. In 1924 she took the first step toward what she envisioned as an eventual expansion of the department's history museum into the realm of fine arts when she accepted copies of paintings by European masters.<sup>30</sup> She prepared an abridged version of Tom's *History* that appeared in 1927.<sup>31</sup> She also resumed her literary pursuits, and in 1927 she published *Yvonne of Braithwaite: A Romance of the Mississippi Delta*, a novel that glorified the vestiges of plantation life in the early twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> In 1930 Marie launched and served as editor of a new ADAH publication, the *Alabama Historical Quarterly*. Since the demise of the *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society* in 1904, Alabama had lacked a state historical journal. Marie's *Quarterly*, however, reflected her literary inclinations and romanticized notions of history; in addition to historical essays, it contained poetry, reminiscences, and a variety of other material. The year 1930 was not an auspicious time to embark on a new publication initiative; after the fourth number, publication of the *Quarterly* was suspended indefinitely, the casualty of the onset of the Great Depression and the arrival of a governor in the state capitol dedi-

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<sup>29</sup> Tyler Goodwyn, "Alabama State Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 1 (Winter 1930): 363-66; "Permanent Home for Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1940): 9-10; Connor, "Dedication of the Archival Section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building," 77-83.

<sup>30</sup> Richard J. Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage, 1850-1985," *Alabama Review* 40 (October 1987): 294.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas McAdory Owen and Marie Bankhead Owen, *Our State—Alabama* (Birmingham: Birmingham Printing Co., 1927).

<sup>32</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen, *Yvonne of Braithwaite: A Romance of the Mississippi Delta* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1927).

cated to cutting costs, balancing the budget, and restructuring state government.

Governor Benjamin M. Miller campaigned in 1930 on a platform of fiscal restraint to solve the state's mounting deficits. After he took office in 1931, he commissioned the Brookings Institution to conduct a comprehensive study of state government.<sup>33</sup> The study's findings regarding ADAH amounted to a status report on the department at the end of its first decade under Marie's leadership. Published in 1932, the Brookings report painted a picture of ADAH as a department in disarray and recommended that it be abolished and its functions assumed by other components of state government.<sup>34</sup> The report suggested that under Marie's leadership the balance among the three arenas described by Walch—cultural/educational, administrative/managerial, and informational/communicative—that characterized ADAH under Tom's leadership had been lost. Instead, the department apparently had become an archival agency that focused on the cultural/educational matters to the virtual exclusion of the other two arenas.

The Brookings report's description and analysis of ADAH appeared in the chapters dealing with education, a clear indication of the agency's cultural/educational focus by the early 1930s. Described variously in the report as a "cultural," or "quasi-educational" agency, the researchers noted that ADAH held broad statutory responsibilities in state government, ranging from care of archives to legislative reference services. They noted that in years past ADAH had been actively engaged in meeting all of these responsibilities, but they did not find at present "that efficiency in operation which is expected of such an agency." Indeed, the report continued, "[c]onditions in recent years have not been conducive to life, growth, and high morale in the organization." The department suffered from lack of adequate

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<sup>33</sup> Samuel L. Webb and Margaret Ambrester, eds., *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 180-84.

<sup>34</sup> Brookings Institution, *Report on a Survey of the State and County Governments of Alabama*, 5 vols. (Montgomery: Wilson Printing Co., 1932). For references to ADAH, state records, and legislative reference, see 1:59-60, 63, 73, 85, 87, 117, 104, 125-31, 135, 137, 203, 251-56, 320-21, 392-98, and 403-04.

facilities, with staff working in two buildings and the collections stored in four other buildings unsuitable for such purposes. Moreover, because of inadequate space, during the mid-1920s ADAH divested itself of the legislative reference library Tom had assembled during his tenure as director. The only “current administrative work” of the department noted in the report amounted to “checking claims in connection with land grants, pensions, National Guard and World War Service, etc.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus the Brookings researchers found little evidence of ADAH activity in the administrative/management and information/communicative arenas. And even in the educational/cultural arena, they found significant problems. They noted that a “vast amount of material has been collected” by the department, but had not been brought under proper physical and intellectual control:

Most of the material has not been properly or completely catalogued; quantities of paper and books have never been removed from the boxes in which they were originally received. Stores of valuable material are subject to damage, deterioration, and the danger of loss by fire. Archival and other historical and museum material valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars is stored in wooden structures in constant danger of destruction by fire. It is understood that material is from time to time taken by petty thieves. Proper facilities are not provided for scholars and research students. In short, the Department is at present managing store-rooms rather than a library.<sup>36</sup>

Given this assessment of ADAH’s contributions to state government, the Brookings researchers recommended abolishing the department and transferring its responsibilities to other units of state government. ADAH’s cultural/educational responsibilities—“historical research functions . . . together with all collections of a historical nature of value for historical research”—

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:393-94.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:393.

were to be transferred to the University of Alabama. The report called for creation of a "Legislative Reference Bureau," responsible for the "general informational and statistical functions for the state Government," and housed in the offices in the Capitol to be vacated by the ADAH staff.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the report recommended the creation of a "Bureau of Records" to take responsibility for management of the records of state government, a function that had recently been lost by ADAH, the result of an attorney general's opinion that the Secretary of State—not ADAH—should have custody of records less than thirty years old.

The picture of ADAH painted by the Brookings report contrasts sharply with the Sage Foundation's assessment fourteen years earlier pronouncing ADAH "one of the most important agencies in state government."<sup>38</sup> In 1932 ADAH was instead depicted as an archival agency stripped of its responsibility for administration of state records, no longer serving a legislative reference function, and failing to properly manage the cultural resources in its custody. Put in Walch's terms, by 1932 ADAH was no longer working in the administrative/management arena or the information/communication arena, and performing poorly in the educational/cultural arena. Consequently, the Brookings analysts recommended the creation of two bureaus—the Bureau of Records and the Legislative Reference Bureau—to take responsibility for work in the administrative/management and information/communication arenas previously handled by ADAH. Stripped of its responsibilities in these arenas and performing poorly in its role as a "cultural and quasi-educational" institution, the Brookings researchers saw little merit in maintaining ADAH as an independent state agency. Thus they recommended its abolition and the assumption of its cultural/educational responsibilities by the University of Alabama.

Fortunately for the future of ADAH, the Miller administration was absorbed in dealing with an unprecedented financial crisis in state government and lacked the energy and political capital required to implement the sweeping reforms

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:403.

<sup>38</sup> Hart, *Social Problems in Alabama*, 21.

recommended in the Brookings report.<sup>39</sup> But the criticisms it contained may have taken their toll on Marie. Frustrated at her lack of success in convincing the state to construct a building for ADAH, beset with financial difficulties, and perhaps unsettled by the Brookings report, Marie seriously contemplated leaving Alabama and her post at ADAH. In 1931 she contacted Tallulah in Hollywood and asked for a job as secretary to her now-famous niece. Tallulah artfully declined the offer and instead loaned her aunt five hundred dollars to pay property taxes.<sup>40</sup> The threat of the Brookings report resurfaced during the gubernatorial campaign of 1934, but the candidate using it as a platform was defeated by Bibb Graves and his coalition of liberals, labor, and New Dealers.<sup>41</sup>

Graves, who in his previous term as governor had supported Marie and ADAH, aggressively sought federal funding for public works projects in Alabama, including an ambitious building program in the capitol complex. Governor Graves's efforts to transform the state capitol and Marie's strong political connections in Washington—both of her brothers were powerful New Dealers in Congress—gave new life to the campaign for an ADAH building. According to one colorful account that has become the stuff of legend in Alabama political lore, Marie convinced Governor Graves to accompany her to Washington where she met with Harry Hopkins, a key member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's staff who was responsible for administering federal public works programs. As the story goes, Hopkins listened impatiently while Marie pleaded for funds for an archives building. After she left the room Hopkins then turned to Governor Graves and admonished him that "the government did not have the money to construct a building for every little old lady who wanted an archives." Whereupon Graves pointed out that Marie just happened to be the sister of John and William Bankhead, news that rendered Hopkins speechless. When he recovered, he ushered Marie back into the room and "inquired where in

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<sup>39</sup> William Warren Rogers et al., *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 499.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 500; Webb and Armbruster, *Alabama Governors*, 179.

Montgomery she planned to build her new archives.”<sup>42</sup> Versions of this story have circulated in Alabama for years, but the details are perhaps less important than the essential truth they contain—by the mid-1930s the fortunes of ADAH had begun to change.

By 1940 ADAH had indeed weathered the difficult times of the 1930s. The scathing Brookings report notwithstanding, ADAH had not been abolished, the bureaus of Records and Legislative Reference had not been created, and the department had moved into a handsome new building adjoining the state Capitol.<sup>43</sup> After Governor Graves left office in 1939, his successor Frank Dixon had launched a massive reorganization of state government based in part on the Brookings report.<sup>44</sup> To head off any possibility that efforts to abolish ADAH might succeed, Marie called on her influential brother, Senator John H. Bankhead II, to intervene on her behalf with the governor and key legislators.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Marie took advantage of another New

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<sup>42</sup> Rogers et al., *Alabama*, 479.

<sup>43</sup> “Permanent Home for Department of Archives and History,” 9-10. In June 1940 the Society of American Archivists held its fourth annual meeting in Montgomery and held a public ceremony dedicating the new building that included an address by National Archivist R. D. W. Connor; see “State Archives [Building] Dedicated by Society of American Archivists,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 2 (Fall 1940): 274; and “Address of Dr. R. D. W. Connor, National Archivist,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1940): 274-81.

<sup>44</sup> Webb and Armbruster, *Alabama Governors*, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen to Sen. John H. Bankhead, February 3, 1939, SG 17913, ADAH. (I am grateful to Anthony Donaldson for bringing this letter to my attention.) Judging from Marie’s letter to her brother, the threat did not come from Governor Dixon—who was “friendly” toward ADAH—but from legislative supporters of the University of Alabama. Indeed, the relationship between Dixon and Marie was apparently quite cordial and extended beyond his term as governor. Dixon was a prominent spokesman for the States’ Rights Democrats (also known as the Dixiecrats), a group of southern Democrats that bolted from the Democratic Party to protest the strong civil rights platform of presidential nominee Harry Truman. Marie supported Dixon and the Dixiecrats, serving as national chair of the group’s women’s division and speaking on behalf of the movement before women’s groups across Alabama. See Glenn Feldman, *From Demagogue to Dixiecrat: Horace Wilkinson and the Politics of Race* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

Deal program, the Historical Records Survey (HRS), to improve her agency's standing in state government. The HRS was an ambitious Works Projects Administration initiative aimed to provide relief work for white-collar workers who would document local records and prepare comprehensive inventories.<sup>46</sup> In 1936 HRS officials set up Alabama's state office in Birmingham rather than Montgomery, and Marie and her staff at ADAH initially had reservations about the project. They feared that the relief aspects of the project would overshadow the survey work. Additionally, Marie was concerned that the federal officials might not involve ADAH staff in the project. But in the end Marie and her staff enjoyed a positive working relationship with HRS officials.<sup>47</sup>

Despite these accomplishments, when Marie Bankhead Owen ended her second decade as director of ADAH, the department's focus remained primarily cultural/educational. Throughout the decade of the thirties Marie had continued her writing career, publishing four history books and another play.<sup>48</sup> There is no indication that ADAH had responded to the chal-

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<sup>46</sup> For a brief description of the HRS see Leonard Rapport, "Dumped from a Wharf into Casco Bay: The Historical Records Survey Revisited," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 201-10; and Edward C. Papenfuse, "A Modicum of Commitment: The Present and Future Importance of the Historical Records Survey," *ibid.*, 211-22. See also Burl Nogle, *Working with History: The Historical Records Survey in Louisiana and the Nation, 1936-1942* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Donaldson, "Surveying Alabama's Historical Records: A Study in New Deal Bureaucracy," *passim* (typescript, copy in possession of author); Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage, 1850-1985," 295-98. Cox offers a negative assessment of the HRS in Alabama, citing differing priorities between Marie and HRS officials. Donaldson, however, has found evidence that state and federal officials developed an effective and productive working relationship after some initial difficulties at the outset.

<sup>48</sup> Marie Bankhead Owen and Ethel H. Crumpton, *From Campfire to Cahaba* (Montgomery: Dixie Book Co., 1936); Marie Bankhead Owen, *Alabama: A Social and Economic History of the State* (Montgomery: Dixie Book Co., 1937); Walter M. Jackson and Marie Bankhead Owen, *History of Alabama for Junior High Schools* (Montgomery: Dixie Book Co., 1938); Marie Bankhead Owen, *The Extra Plate: A Four Act Comedy* (Montgomery: Wilson Printing Co., 1937).

lenges posed by the Brookings report by strengthening the administrative/management and informational/communicative components of its operations. Instead, Marie had used her political connections to protect ADAH and obtain funding for a magnificent edifice that provided a sense of institutional gravity for the department. Indeed, by 1940 ADAH's status was so secure that the defunct *Alabama Historical Quarterly* resumed publication. Thus ADAH entered the 1940s secure in its status as a state agency, but its role in state government had changed significantly under Marie's stewardship.

Marie entered her third decade as director at age seventy, but she showed no inclination to retire. With her department settled in a new building and war mobilization looming, perhaps she considered it an inauspicious time to step down. Moreover, the World War II era brought prosperity and a focus on defeating enemies abroad, and the push to streamline and consolidate state government from the 1930s no longer threatened the existence of ADAH. The year 1945 brought not only an end to war, but two important developments for ADAH. First, because ADAH had shown no inclination to resume the legislative reference function developed by Tom during his tenure, the Alabama legislature finally established its own Legislative Reference Service, in effect implementing one of the key recommendations of the Brookings report.<sup>49</sup> Thus the state finally responded to ADAH's de facto abandonment of the legislative reference function in the 1920s.

Second, 1945 witnessed the passage of new legislation regarding public records in Alabama, the work of Maud McLure Kelly, an energetic and highly competent woman who joined the ADAH staff in 1943. Kelly was born in 1887 and from an early age set her sights on becoming an attorney, inspired by the example of her father. She graduated from the law department at the University of Alabama and in 1908 became the first woman admitted to the Alabama bar. In 1931, after a successful career in private practice in Alabama and with the federal government in Washington, she retired early so that she could care for her aged mother. Nevertheless, she remained active in politics, in club work, and as a professional genealogi-

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<sup>49</sup> Homepage of the Alabama Legislative Reference Service, <[www.lrs.state.al.us](http://www.lrs.state.al.us)>, accessed July 22, 2004.

cal researcher. By the early 1940s she sought new challenges, and when Marie offered her the position of "Historical Materials Collector," she readily accepted.<sup>50</sup>

Hired in her mid-fifties, Kelly's talents, experience, and reputation were a decided asset to the department. As an attorney she recognized the legal value of public records, she had experience in working in a federal agency, and she was active in politics.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, she had for many years been active in a variety of religious, civic, social, and patriotic organizations in Alabama. Finally, shortly before joining the ADAH staff she had served as clerk for her brother, a member of the state senate, giving her experience and connections to the Alabama legislature.<sup>52</sup>

Kelly immediately assumed a broad range of responsibilities and traveled widely throughout Alabama, making speeches and soliciting papers, records, and artifacts to add to the department's holdings. She conducted a survey of the department's holdings and recommended the adoption of new conservation techniques. She also surveyed public records in county courthouses and in state agencies and discovered that many had been lost or sold, or were deteriorated to the point of uselessness. The appalling conditions of records not in ADAH custody so disturbed Kelly that she drafted new records legislation and in 1945 secured the passage of two new public records acts.<sup>53</sup>

Kelly's brother, Richard B. Kelly Jr., served as the senate sponsor for both bills, and they passed without dissent, a testament to the effectiveness of Kelly's lobbying efforts. One was a fairly straightforward provision that authorized the de-

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<sup>50</sup> Cynthia Newman, *Maud McLure Kelly: Alabama's First Woman Lawyer*, Samford University Library Research Series, Paper No. 6 (Birmingham: Birmingham Printing & Pub. Co., 1984), passim.

<sup>51</sup> Ironically, Kelly and Marie had been on opposite sides on the issue of woman's suffrage. Kelly actively campaigned in favor of suffrage while Marie was an ardent opponent. See Newman, *Maud McLure Kelly*, 14-16, and Thomas, *New Woman in Alabama*, 195.

<sup>52</sup> Newman, *Maud McLure Kelly*, 24-27, 33.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

posit of non-current county records in ADAH, thus providing a safe repository for local records in danger of loss. The other, described by Kelly as “more important and far-reaching,” defined public records, specified penalties for their improper destruction or sale, and gave the ADAH director broad authority regarding the management of public records. Specifically, ADAH was “empowered to make such orders, rules, and regulations as may be necessary or proper” to ensure that no public records were destroyed without the consent of the ADAH director. The act also authorized the ADAH director to recover public records unlawfully removed from state custody and to provide assistance upon request to records custodians.<sup>54</sup> This legislation could have provided a foundation for a records management program under the aegis of ADAH, but the potential was not realized. Perhaps the broad scope of Kelly’s responsibilities contributed to this missed opportunity.

By 1945 Marie had reached her seventy-fifth birthday, but still showed no sign of retiring. She continued as director until 1955, and the final decade of her tenure brought no significant new initiatives. Large quantities of private papers and public records flowed into the new building, but the department still lacked a program for acquiring effective intellectual and physical control over its holdings. By the time of Marie’s retirement, space for holdings in the ADAH building was at a premium.<sup>55</sup>

Despite these problems, Marie could boast of important accomplishments during her thirty-five years as director. She had weathered the difficult years of the Great Depression and had maintained ADAH’s status as an independent agency in the face of at least two attempts to abolish it. She had secured permanent facilities for the department and had filled the building with a rich and varied collection of material. Nevertheless, by the end of her long tenure the ADAH no longer held the preeminent position in state government and national archival affairs that it had enjoyed during its first two decades. Instead, it had become an archival agency that had fallen from its posi-

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<sup>54</sup> Maud McLure Kelly, “Recent Legislation Concerning Alabama’s Public Records,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1945): 77-82.

<sup>55</sup> Cox, “Alabama’s Archival Heritage, 1850-1985,” 299-301.

tion of archival leadership and was no longer in the archival mainstream.

Ironically, the Alabama archives seems to have fallen from archival grace, so to speak, during the middle decades of the twentieth century, just as archivists began to define themselves professionally and grapple with the explosion of records that characterized this century. The best evidence for this conclusion is found in Ernst Posner's comprehensive survey of state archives, conducted in 1962 and 1963.<sup>56</sup> His four-hundred-page report, dedicated to archivists Margaret Cross Norton of Illinois and Mary Givens Bryan of Georgia, analyzed the status of each state's archival and records management programs. Posner's report was, of course, prepared several years after Marie's retirement. She was succeeded by Peter A. Brannon, who had joined the department in 1911.<sup>57</sup> Brannon became director in 1955 at age seventy-three and remained in the position until his death in 1967 at age eighty-five.<sup>58</sup> Between them, Marie and Peter Brannon directed the Alabama archives for forty-seven years. Brannon's previous forty-four years with the department and his advanced age made it inevitable that he would simply continue the policies and procedures of his predecessor.

Posner found Alabama's state archives a hollow shell of the agency that had once served as a model for the likes of R. D. W. Connor and other budding archivists in the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> He duly noted that "Alabama was the first state . . . to establish a Department of Archives and History . . . to serve as the official custodian of the state's ar-

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<sup>56</sup> Posner, *American State Archives*, ix.

<sup>57</sup> Peter A. Brannon, "The Alabama Department of Archives and History," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1962): 7.

<sup>58</sup> Richard J. Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage," in *Assessing Alabama's Archives: A Plan for the Preservation of the State's Historical Records* (Montgomery: Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board, 1985), 60-63. Cox's, "Alabama's Archival Heritage, 1850-1985," *Alabama Review* 40 (October 1987): 284-307 is a revised version of this essay.

<sup>59</sup> Connor, "Dedication of the Archival Section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building," 82.

chives.”<sup>60</sup> Like the Brookings analysts three decades earlier, he found a department in disarray, with records “piled up in the aisles where they impede traffic” and staff so busy handling researchers, answering reference queries, and trying to “restore order” that “they have no time for arrangement and description.”<sup>61</sup> He noted that the legislature had passed a records act in 1955<sup>62</sup> at the behest of state and local officials who were prodding the archives to take the lead in the management of government records.<sup>63</sup> These administrators maintained that records management should be central to ADAH’s mission. The act established State and County Records commissions, to be chaired by the ADAH director and authorized to conduct records surveys, oversee microfilming, and develop records disposition schedules. But ADAH did not launch or support any records management initiatives. The 1961 *Guide to State and Provincial Archival Agencies*, published by the Society of American Archivists State Records Committee, listed Alabama as one of nineteen states without a records management program.<sup>64</sup> Like the public records act of 1945, the 1955 legislation could have formed the basis for an effective records management program in Alabama, but ADAH opposed the law, and the director refused to convene either commission.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, Posner found that the department had “brought in [records] with no attention to their retention value and that are not under schedule control.” Moreover, some of the holdings “are [still] very active [records and] should not be in the department.”<sup>66</sup> By

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<sup>60</sup> Posner, *American State Archives*, 38.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>63</sup> Cox, “Alabama’s Archival Heritage,” in *Assessing Alabama’s Archives*, 61-62.

<sup>64</sup> H. G. Jones, ed., *Guide to State and Provincial Archival Agencies, 1961* (n.p.: Society of American Archivists, State Records Committee, 1961), 1.

<sup>65</sup> Posner, *American State Archives*, 42; Cox, “Alabama’s Archival Heritage,” in *Assessing Alabama’s Archives*, 60-61.

<sup>66</sup> Posner, *American State Archives*, 41.

1966 the finance department—the most powerful state agency in Alabama—could no longer ignore the growing records problems and hired its own records management consultant to advise on records administration.<sup>67</sup>

In short, the picture of ADAH painted by Posner is hardly that of an agency that, in the words of Tom Owen, considered its responsibility of “first and supreme importance” to be the “care and custody of official archives.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, one can hardly imagine the politically savvy Tom missing the opportunity to capitalize on the new field of records management and provide a service to public officials clamoring for help with records that were swamping their offices.

If Posner’s sobering assessment is correct, what became of the dynamic archival agency Marie inherited from her husband? Several years ago Terry Eastwood proposed a model for the development of archival agencies that may suggest some answers. Based on an examination of the development of the national archives of Canada and Australia, Eastwood argues that the classic pattern of archival development proceeds in three phases. It begins with a rescue phase, in which the focus is on the “rescue of historical materials, usually seen to be at risk and valuable primarily as cultural artifacts.” In the second phase, the establishment phase, archival leaders begin to focus on “establishing the legal authority and institutional infrastructure of archives.” Administrative and legal values of records receive more emphasis in this phase, and ultimately the life-cycle-of-records concept emerges as a guiding principle for the management of records. In the third phase, the management phase, archivists focus on “managing, maintaining, and perfecting [the] authority and infrastructure” of their institutions. In this phase archivists strive to balance three competing ideas about archives: first, “archives as arsenals of history,” second,

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<sup>67</sup> Milo Howard to Rucker Agee, June 8, 1966, in “Board of Trustees, 1966” folder, SG 17915, ADAH.

<sup>68</sup> Owen, “State Departments of Archives and History,” 239.

archives “as arsenals of administration,” and third, archives “as arsenals of law.”<sup>69</sup>

Eastwood found that the Canadian national archives proceeded steadily through each phase of the model. The rescue phase began in 1857 with the efforts of Thomas Akins, the “exemplar of the historian-archivist-rescuer of documents.” Not until 1948, under W. Kaye Lamb, did the Canadian archives enter the second phase of development, the establishment phase. Under Lamb Canada’s national archives began to “establish effective authority over public records, seize a vital role in their management, create an infrastructure of facilities, organization, and staff sufficient unto that task, and overcome the fascination with colonial origins.” Lamb’s retirement in 1968 marked the transition to phase three, the management phase, and the effort to perfect the authority and infrastructure of the Canadian archives.<sup>70</sup>

Australia departed from the classic pattern of Eastwood’s model. Public archives did not emerge in Australia until after World War II. Consequently, most of the early rescue work of phase one fell to libraries. Australia’s late start “compressed” archival development “down under”; according to Eastwood, “phase one was hardly experienced at all before public repositories were caught up in the trials of stage two.” And by the mid-1980s Australia’s national archival authority was “rapidly being swept up in the management concerns of the third phase.”<sup>71</sup>

Applying Eastwood’s model to Alabama, we find that it did not follow the prototypical pattern of Canada or the compressed pattern of Australia. Unlike many states, Alabama did not enjoy the benefits of historical societies and libraries engaged in rescue work during the nineteenth century. Alabama entered phase one in the 1890s, later than many other states, when Tom Owen took an interest in his state’s history. When

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<sup>69</sup> Terence M. Eastwood, “Reflections on the Development of Archives in Canada and Australia,” in Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability through Recordkeeping* (Melbourne: Ancora Press, 1993), 27, 36.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-31.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Tom died in 1920, the “institutional infrastructure” of the agency was still fragile. The department did not have its own facility, the staff was small and underpaid, and the budget was limited.<sup>72</sup> But considering the circumstances, Tom had made remarkable progress. In terms of Eastwood’s model, he was concurrently tackling the tasks of both the rescue phase and the establishment phase. In contrast with Canada (which remained in the rescue phase for ninety years) and Australia (which bypassed the rescue phase), Tom was rescuing records and promoting history on one front, establishing legal authority on another, and focusing on the administrative values of records on yet a third front.

Unlike her husband, Marie was unable—or perhaps unwilling—to maintain a dynamic balance between the cultural functions of the department and its administrative support functions. Instead, she *emphasized* history and especially heritage to the *detriment* of administrative support. Moreover, she emphasized the cultural mission despite circumstances that could have pushed her in the opposite direction. During the years of her directorship, other institutions began to emerge and take responsibility for promoting Alabama’s history and heritage. For example, in 1945 the University of Alabama library established a special collections department to collect historical manuscripts, but the state archives continued to collect private papers, thus diluting resources that could have been redirected toward governmental records.<sup>73</sup> In 1947 a new state historical organization was formed, the Alabama Historical Association, to replace the old historical society that had folded in 1905. The new association began to publish a quarterly historical journal, the *Alabama Review*,<sup>74</sup> but the state archives continued to publish its own *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, launched by Marie in 1930.

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<sup>72</sup> Cox, “Alabama’s Archival Heritage,” in *Assessing Alabama’s Archives*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Society of Alabama Archivists, *Archives and Manuscripts in Alabama: A Repository Guide* (n.p., 1997), 21.

<sup>74</sup> Allen J. Going, “Historical Societies in Alabama,” *Alabama Review* 1 (January 1948): 39-49; Leah Rawls Atkins, “The Alabama Historical Association: The First Fifty Years,” *Alabama Review* 50 (October 1997): 243-66.

Although various organizations began to take up some aspects of the department's cultural mission, no agency challenged ADAH's responsibilities for managing and preserving the records of state and local government. Equally important, during Marie's term as director, the quantity and complexity of government records increased dramatically. Archivists at the National Archives tackled the explosion of records that accompanied the New Deal and World War II head on—they developed the life-cycle-of-records concept and records management. But the Alabama archives turned a blind eye to these developments. Despite the promise of Marie's leadership, she failed to carry her husband's vision forward. Under her stewardship, the department retreated and remained mired in phase one at least until 1967, when the fourth director—and the first born in the twentieth century—took the helm.

Thus Eastwood's model offers an explanation as to *what* happened in Alabama. He also offers a clue as to *why* it happened when he argues that ideas about archives, more than personality or resources, have dictated the fortunes of institutions.<sup>75</sup> The ideas that inspired Tom led him to establish an institution that filled a cultural vacuum, an administrative vacuum, and an informational vacuum. Marie however, was apparently more animated by the idea of heritage, or in Eastwood's words, "archives as arsenals of culture." She clung to this idea in the face of a changing environment that made single-minded emphasis on heritage increasingly problematic for her agency. The idea of archives as arsenals of administration and law did not loom large in her vision of the agency and its role in the state. Consequently, she resisted increasing pressure to establish a records administration program for state and local governments. As a result, ADAH lost its status as an agency of practical value, focused almost exclusively on heritage, and came to be regarded as the domain of antiquarians and genealogists. Of course, as cultural geographer David Lowenthal has argued, heritage has a legitimate function within any society, providing a sense of community and continuity.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Eastwood, "Reflections on the Development of Archives," 27.

<sup>76</sup> David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), *passim*.

Tom Owen understood perfectly well the functions of heritage and skillfully used them to promote his vision of ADAH's role in Alabama society and government. But by mid-century the department was no longer the vital agency of its early decades. In the words of one distinguished historian of Alabama, it had become "a veritable attic of the gentry crammed with such artifacts as Confederate swords, rifles, and uniforms; stuffed owls and foxes; the fine chinaware and silver service once used by Vice-President [William Rufus] King; old Mardi Gras costumes complete with crowns; inaugural ball gowns worn by governors' wives; even [Judge] Charles Tait's wooden leg."<sup>77</sup>

When Peter Brannon died in 1967, he was succeeded by Milo B. Howard, a staff member who had been groomed for the position. Howard was thirty-four when he took over, the same age as Tom Owen when he was appointed in 1901. He held an MA in history from Auburn University, the first director to hold an advanced degree in history. The years of Milo Howard's directorship held great promise. He was young and energetic, and he seemed to recognize the importance of taking the initiative in records administration. Under his leadership the department activated the State and County Records commissions, conducted surveys, and prepared record schedules. Recognizing the need to provide guidance on records disposition to state agencies, the department published a records retention manual in 1973.<sup>78</sup>

Howard also had to deal with a space problem, for the building constructed by Marie was filled to overflowing. Anxious to secure space for the department's collections, Howard devoted himself to adding a new wing to the archives building. Today that wing on the east side of the original building is known as the Coley Wing in honor of Judge C. J. Coley, who served as chairman of the board of trustees for many years. The promise of Howard's tenure as director was cut short when he died suddenly in 1981, not quite fifty.

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<sup>77</sup> Virginia Van der Veer Hamilton, *Alabama: A History* (1977; reprint, Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 125-26.

<sup>78</sup> Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage, 1850-1985," 302-03.

In 1982 Edwin C. Bridges left his position with the Georgia state archives to become the department's fifth director. With a PhD in history from the University of Chicago, Bridges was the first director to hold a doctorate in history. In addition to his academic training, Bridges had ten years of management experience in Georgia and was active in the major national archival and records management organizations. Thus he brought to the position a broad understanding of the problems of the nation's state archives.

Shortly after he took the helm, Bridges and his staff obtained a grant from the National Archives to assess the status of archival programs in Alabama and develop a comprehensive plan for preservation of the state's historical records. Completed in 1985, the report of the assessment grant has served as a blueprint for a number of subsequent initiatives. Since 1985 the Alabama archives has established a records center, revitalized the records commissions, published numerous records disposition schedules, entered descriptions of departmental holdings in national databases, and begun to focus on the problem of managing electronic records.

In 2001 the ADAH celebrated its centennial; and despite the obvious changes over the decades, balancing the cultural, administrative, and informational missions of the department remains a central challenge. Tom Owen understood that these three missions can and should complement each other. And although Marie seems to have tipped the scales in favor of heritage and culture, she nevertheless maintained the department's status as an independent agency, an accomplishment that makes possible the current efforts to restore the balance to ADAH's mission.

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