

LETTERS FROM THE LIBRARY

NEWSLETTER OF THE STATE LAW LIBRARY OF MISSISSIPPI

“There shall be ... a library ... known as the state library”
An Act to provide for a State Library – General Laws, 1838

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Library’s Research Supports Upcoming Art Exhibit

Librarian Stephen Parks met Nashville-based artist Noah Saterstrom at an art show in Jackson in the spring of 2018. In conversation, Saterstrom related how he was hoping to research the life of his great-grandfather, Dr. David L. Smith. This conversation sparked numerous research projects that has now led to an upcoming [exhibition](#) at the Mississippi Museum of Art in the spring Of 2024.

As described by the Museum, “*What Became of Dr. Smith* envisions the life of artist Noah Saterstrom’s great-grandfather, a traveling optometrist who, according to family lore, disappeared in 1924. Saterstrom’s years-long search in state, local, and private archives yielded evidence of a complex set of events that resulted in Dr. Smith’s institutionalization for forty years at the Mississippi State Insane Hospital (the Old Asylum) in Jackson, and later at the Mississippi State Hospital in nearby Whitfield, Mississippi. Presented as an immersive narrative painting of 183 canvases that together span 122 feet, *What Became of Dr. Smith* is the visual culmination of the story that emerged one century after it was erased from his family’s record. The exhibition will include historical artifacts from the life of Dr. Smith, as well as Saterstrom’s archival findings and those of the Asylum Hill Project (AHP), a research consortium dedicated to uncovering the history of the Old Asylum and memorializing the approximately 7,000 human remains recently discovered there. *What Became of Dr. Smith* expands on Saterstrom and AHP’s shared goal of acknowledging those marginalized by society due to mental illness.”

Utilizing Library resources, Parks was able to uncover legal records from Dr. Smith’s arrest and lunacy hearing in 1924, admittance into the Mississippi State Hospital, divorce trial, and much more. Court records were uncovered in Jackson, Vicksburg, Port Gibson, and Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

Earlier this fall, the Museum of Art hosted the event *From Archive to Art: In Conversation with Noah Saterstrom and Stephen Parks*. Moderated by Lida Gibson, coordinator of the Asylum Hill Project,

the conversation centered around Saterstrom's creative process and how it was informed by research that Parks provided.

During the pandemic, Saterstrom began to paint small pieces related to research finds that were being uncovered. Below are a few of those pieces. These, and others, can be seen on Instagram at [@noahsats](https://www.instagram.com/noahsats).

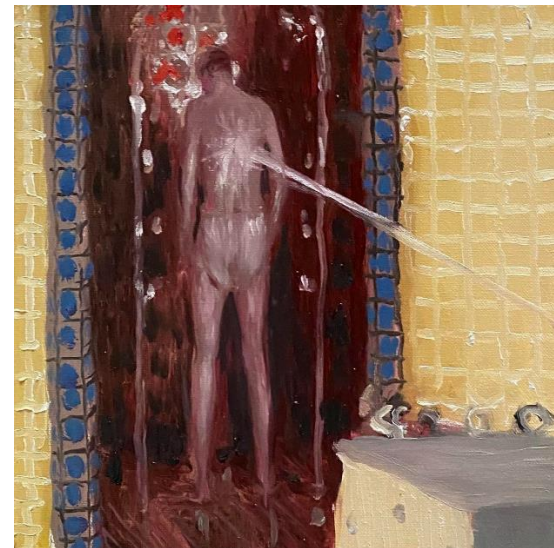


What Became of Dr. Smith will be exhibited April 20 – September 22, 2024 at the Mississippi Museum of Art in downtown Jackson.

Painting, Left: Dr. Smith's Lunacy Hearing in Claiborne County, Mississippi

Painting, Bottom Left: Dr. Smith facing a local mob in Hermanville, Mississippi, after accusations of sexual assault were made against him.

Painting, Bottom Right: As a patient at the Mississippi State Hospital, Smith was treated by a number of methods, including hydrotherapy.



In Memoriam: Justice James L. Robertson

Justice Robertson was a good friend of the Library even after having left the Supreme Court. He routinely requested our assistance as he worked on various projects and as he worked on his book, *Heroes, Rascals, and the Law: Constitutional Encounters in Mississippi History*. In June, 2019, he spoke at an event hosted by the Library where he discussed his writing process and provided a few stories from his book.

Rather than reprinting his [obituary](#), we would like to share with you Beverly Kraft's writeup from when Justice Robertson presented his portrait to the Supreme Court. Kraft's writeup includes the historical tidbit of how Robertson introduced online legal research to the Supreme Court by arranging for the Library to have a Lexis terminal.

"Former Justice James Robertson donates portrait to Supreme Court

October 13, 2015

Former Mississippi Supreme Court Justice James L. Robertson of Jackson gathered with current justices and some of his former colleagues Thursday, Oct. 8, to unveil his portrait and reminisce.



"We are honored that you would make this bequest," Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. told Justice Robertson and his wife, Administrative Judge, author and artist Linda Thompson.

Oxford artist Deborah Freeland drew the profile portrait in graphite in 1984, a year after Robertson joined the court.

The portrait was hung Thursday outside the entrance to the State Law Library. It was added to the Supreme Court's historic collection, which includes more than 40 portraits of justices who served from the 1800s to modern times.

Former Chief Justice Edwin Lloyd Pittman, who served with Robertson, said he was a scholarly, prolific writer in his court opinions as well as law journal articles. "Robertson is a brilliant lawyer and a brilliant mind. I did give him advice on street sense on occasion," Pittman said.

Robertson ushered in modern legal research for the court. When he arrived at the court, "there was nothing but law books here. I had been using Lexis for three years. I couldn't imagine having to function without it....How could you possibly operate the court without that kind of resource?" he recalled. He arranged for the Law Library to have a Lexis terminal installed, with three months of free use, after which the court could subscribe to the service or give it up. "I couldn't get anyone to go near it."

On the last day of the free trial, Chief Justice Neville Patterson needed to locate an opinion in a case he

had authored in years past. He remembered only the defendant's nickname. It took Robertson about 30 seconds to find the case using Lexis. Patterson was amazed and said, "We've got to have this," Robertson recalled. Afterwards, the running complaint was the amount of fees the court spent monthly for Robertson's legal research – until Justice Fred Banks came to the court and used the service twice as much.

The scholarly Justice Banks laughed.

There were no computers. The fastest typewriter was an IBM Selectric, and a typist had to retype the whole page if a mistake was made. The old Gartin Justice Building's decor, including ugly yellow naugahyde chairs, was once described by a court administrator as "early fish camp."

The justices with whom Robertson served were larger-than-life characters: former Chief Justices Patterson, Roy Noble Lee, Armis Hawkins, Harry Walker, Dan Lee, Lenore Prather and Pittman, and Presiding Justices Michael Sullivan and Chuck McRae. Robertson cherished memories of serving with Justices Reuben Anderson and Joseph Zuccaro.

Recalling Sullivan's biting wit often delivered in a stage whisper, Robertson said people have asked what it was like to work with him. "Imagine working with Don Rickles every day."

McRae said, "There were some great times."

Pittman said later, "Sometimes Chuck made it more exciting than I wanted it to be."

Robertson added, "All of my Roy Noble Lee stories are in an in memoriam piece I authored for the Capital Area Bar Association Newsletter last spring." Previously, Robertson published a tribute to Neville Patterson, the first Chief Justice under whom he served.

Robertson was a member of the faculty of the University of Mississippi School of Law from 1977 through 1992. He taught full-time 1979 until his appointment to the Supreme Court. He continued to teach a legal philosophy course while serving on the court.

Gov. William Winter appointed Robertson to a vacancy on the court on Jan. 17, 1983. Robertson served on the court for more than nine years. He was defeated in his second election campaign. He resigned Sept. 1, 1992, and taught the fall semester of 1992 as a visiting professor of law at Fordham Law School in Manhattan.

He has been a shareholder in the Jackson law firm of Wise, Carter, Child & Caraway, P.A., since 1993. He is currently listed in Best Lawyers in American in the specialties of admiralty and maritime, civil rights, commercial litigation, antitrust, environmental, intellectual property and First Amendment law.

Justice Robertson, 75, was born in Greenwood and grew up in Greenville. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mississippi in 1962 and a law degree from Harvard University in 1965.

His 50-year reunion at Harvard is coming up soon. When he learned that about 100 of his classmates have died, he started working on a "bucket list." The portrait presentation was on the list.

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Picture, Above: Justice Roberston at the Library's Inaugural Holiday Open House in 2018 along with Dean Jim Rosenblatt, Judge Donna Barnes, and Stephen Parks

Library's Holiday Open House Display



This year's display had 411 books. Congratulations to the winners of this year's contests: Gabi Lang (Judge Lawrence), Elise Stewart (Justice King), Angela Etter (AOC), and Reese Neely (Justice Griffis)

2023 in the Headlines

Analyzing Google Alerts about the Mississippi Supreme Court and Court of Appeals throughout 2023, this Word Cloud reveals the most used words in news headlines.

We in the State Law Library appreciate the opportunity to assist the Judiciary this past year and look forward to a great year in 2024.

