

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

December 2022

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State Library Hours

Monday – Friday
8am – 5pm

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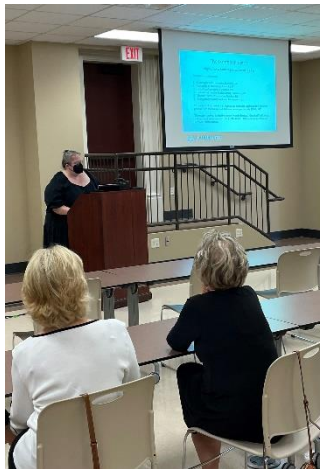
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Library hosts *The Lantern Project*

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The Lantern Project makes available records of enslaved people:

Court records from the 1800s are seeing the light of day – and a digital scanner – as the Lantern Project works to make records of enslaved people accessible to the public. “The goal is access,” said Jennifer McGillan, coordinator of manuscripts for Mississippi State



University Libraries and leader of the project.

The U.S. Census did not list the names of formerly enslaved persons until 1870, making tracking family histories more difficult. The Lantern Project has identified and scanned documents naming enslaved persons in probate records, deeds, civil and criminal court records, plantation records, receipts, bills of sale and other documents from the early 1800s through 1865.

In an Oct. 4 presentation sponsored by the Mississippi Law Library, McGillan displayed images of wills, estates and other legal papers, handwritten in scribbles and precise, flowing script on pages yellowed and fading, some creased and crumbling. The originals are in library collections and old court files around the state, accessible mostly to those with the means to travel to a courthouse and dig for information. The project will provide online access to a text-searchable, indexed collection containing digital images of original documents.

“We have a lot of patrons who are trying to research their slave ancestors,” McGillan said. “They describe it as being sold into

darkness or disappearing into darkness, never to be heard from again. This is our attempt to turn on the lights.”

Estate inventories and appraisals, for instance, list enslaved persons by name along with land, buildings, livestock, furniture and other property. Those inventories sometimes included age, family information, such as “son of” or “daughter of,” and special skills such as blacksmith or tanner. Wills from the 1800s include names of enslaved persons as ownership passed from the deceased to others, enabling a researcher to possibly track people.



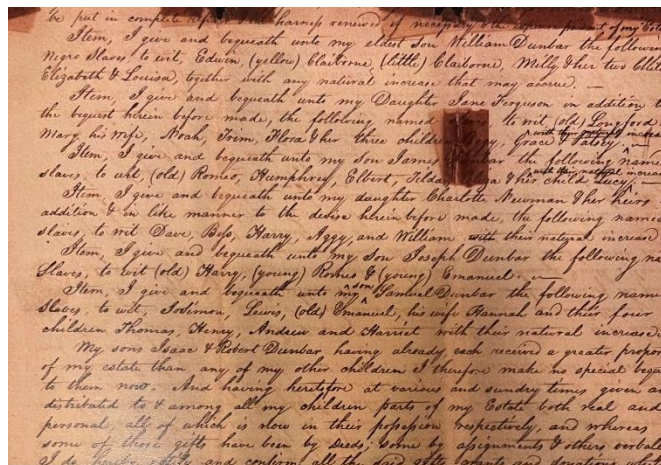
Lantern Project participants are Mississippi State University, the University of Mississippi, Delta State University, the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library, the Historic Natchez Foundation and the Montgomery County Archives in Montgomery, Ala. The project is funded by a \$340,000 grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the United States National Archives and Records Administration. The grant will end in December.

The Lantern Project includes records from participating library collections and records from Adams County, Lowndes County, Washington County and a few other counties, mostly across north Mississippi, and Alabama’s Montgomery County. Other counties have expressed interest.

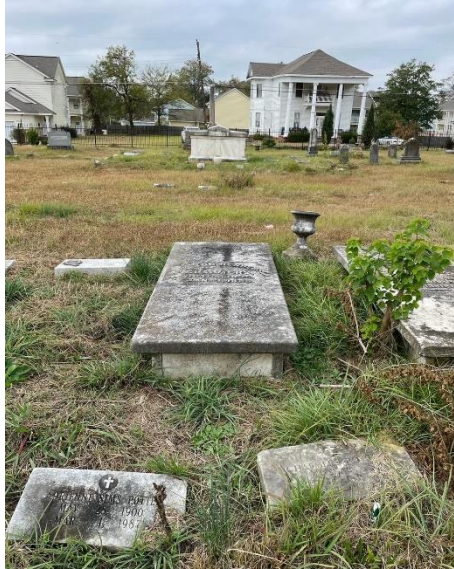
“It’s not everything. We wish we could do more but we have our limits,” McGillan said.

For more information about the Lantern Project, go to this website:

<https://www.lanternproject.msstate.edu/>.



Above: An example of the records the Lantern Project is digitizing: The 1826 will of an Adams County planter, listing enslaved persons by name as the planter willed ownership of individuals and families to his sons and daughters.



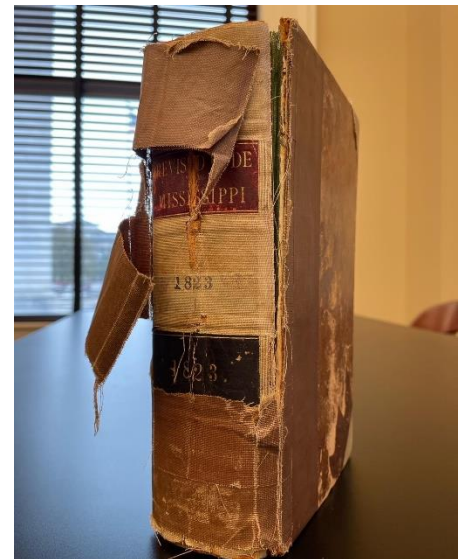
Justice H.H. Chalmers, 1835-1855

The Library recently received a reference request seeking out a picture or portrait of Justice H.H. Chalmers. Unfortunately, we do not have any picture or portrait of the late Justice. We were, however, able to send the requestor a few things. Chalmers happens to be buried just across the street in Greenwood Cemetery, and we took a few photos of his grave. The Library is also in possession of the 1823 Mississippi Code that was once owned by Chalmers. We sent a photo of it as well.

Hamilton Henderson Chalmers was born in North Carolina in 1835. He moved to Mississippi in 1839. After graduating from the University of Mississippi in 1853, Chalmers moved to Jackson where he studied law. He served as State Librarian and Keeper of the Capitol 1854-1855. In 1876, he was appointed by the Governor to the Mississippi Supreme Court. He served on the Court until his death in 1885.



A 1904 Report of the Department of Archives and History does indicate that a portrait of Chalmers was presented to the Department by his wife. No current record of the portrait still being in the State's possession is had.



Photos Above: On left, the grave of H.H. Chalmers in the Greenwood Cemetery, Jackson, MS. On right, the 1823 Mississippi Code once owned by Chalmers. An inscription in the book notes that Mrs. H.H. Chalmers gave it to the State Library in December, 1888. The State Librarian, Mary Morancy, wrote: "This Book is valuable and only two copies in the Library."

Library Hosts Holiday Open House

The Library held its annual Holiday Open House on Thursday, December 15. A fun time was had by all who attended. This year's tree was made entirely of Legislative Bills volumes. Kate Morgan and Ann Heidke guessed the exact number of 102 books. A game comparing the Library's 1845 La Tourette Map of Mississippi to today's Map led to the following receiving prizes: the MEC Department, Seth Dickinson, Grant Krag, and Grey Hollowell.



2022 in the Headlines

Analyzing Google Alerts about the Mississippi Supreme Court and Court of Appeals throughout 2022, 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 2023.

