

Letters from the Library

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

December 2016

In This Issue

Library Partners	1
Irwin Russell	2
Looking Back	3
Library Exhibit	4
"Missing" Art	5
Blog Mention	7
New Titles	7
Book Tree	8

State Library Hours

Monday – Friday
8am – 5pm

Library Staff

Stephen Parks – State Librarian

Casandra Noel – Circulation Librarian

LaTavius Jackson – Reference Librarian

Judy Reedy – Catalog Librarian

Library Partners with the Mississippi Digital Library

by Stephen Parks

The Library has joined the Mississippi Digital Library as a partner institution. The motto of the Digital Library is "Bringing Mississippi to researchers around the world." The Digital Library currently has 33 partners ranging from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jackson to the Carnegie Public Library of Clarksdale and Coahoma County. Partners provide historical content through the Digital Library, and the Digital Library in turn provides all collections for free searching, browsing, and viewing. The Digital Library's Web site is www.msdl.org.

As a Partner, the State Library plans to provide historical content related to the Library's history. Thus far, the State Library has provided its newsletter and meeting minutes of the State Library Board from the 1960s and 1970s. It is hoped that eventually the State Library will be able to scan and provide digitized versions of the Mississippi House and Senate Journals as its physical copies age and deteriorate on the shelves.

The State Library's Partner page is <http://www.msdl.org/about/partners/sllm>. Below is a sample of what researchers can see when visiting items on its Digital page.

The screenshot shows the Mississippi Digital Library website. At the top, there is a logo for the Mississippi Digital Library with the tagline "Bringing Mississippi to Researchers Around the World". Below the logo is a navigation bar with "Home", "Browse All", and "About" links. The main content area displays a document titled "Minutes of meeting of state library board on February 15, 1968". The document text is as follows:

MINUTES OF MEETING OF STATE LIBRARY BOARD
ON FEBRUARY 15, 1968

On proper written notice, the State Library Board held a meeting on February 15, 1968, in the Supreme Court Conference Room, 101 New Capitol. There was a quorum of the Board present, namely, Chief Justice W. N. Ethridge, Jr., Presiding Justice Robert G. Gillespie, and Attorney General Joe T. Patterson. Also present and representing Governor John Bell Williams was Hon. Herman Glazier; and Mrs. Julia Starnes, State Law Librarian and Secretary of the Board.

Below the document text, there is a "Description" section with the following metadata:

Identifier: sllm:libraryhistory:002
Title: Minutes of meeting of state library board on February 15, 1968

Irwin Russell: Who was he?

When we give tours in the Library, we often are asked “Who’s that?” when walking by the bust of Irwin Russell. Some see the bust and see a young Peyton Manning. They do favor, somewhat, but the bust is truly that of Irwin Russell. Russell was not a judge in Mississippi, so the next question is usually “Why is he in the State Law Library.” The teachers of Mississippi commissioned a bust of Russell in 1907, and it was placed in the Mississippi Capitol. The State Library was in the Capitol at that time, and we can only assume the bust was placed in the Library before the Library’s move over to the Carroll Gartin Justice Building.

So who was Russell? Russell was born in Port Gibson, MS, in 1853. He attended school outside of the state, but he did return to Port Gibson where he, at the age of 19, petitioned the Mississippi Legislature to admit him to the state’s Bar. He became a talented poet, specializing in the use of dialect. He was widely known for his use of southern poor white English, Irish, and African-American dialect. Not long after his father died, Russell moved to New Orleans where he became an alcoholic and contracted typhoid fever. He died at the young age of 26.

His poetry, especially his pieces using African-American dialect, is credited for laying the foundation for William Faulkner and Eudora Welty’s use of dialect.



On the left, a portrait of Russell from the Mississippi Writers Page of the Ole Miss English Department. On the right, the bust of Russell currently in the Library.

MISS MATTIE PLUNKETT GETS NEW YORKER'S GOAT

Librarian of Mississippi Denies Charge Elections "Beauty Contests."

Standing before a large audience of librarians from every state in the Union, during the convention of the State Librarians' association in Washington, D. C., last week, Miss Mattie Plunkett, state librarian of Mississippi, openly resented a charge that had just been made by J. L. Wyer, New York state librarian, to the effect that "in the south they hold beauty contests when selecting their librarians; in the north it is too often the case that politics enter into appointments; in the south the elections by legislatures are simply beauty contests."

Miss Plunkett, according to her friends who heard her reply, told the assembled librarians that the New Yorker simply did not know what he was talking about so far as the south was concerned. She said she resented the implication that southern women were chosen for positions because of their beauty, and not their fitness for the jobs, saying, "look at me, everybody. I am a living refutation of the charge made by Mr. Wyer. I was elected by the legislature over nearly half a dozen applicants, all of whom were better looking than I am, and some of them were really beautiful. Not only that, but I have served my state as librarian for sixteen years. Then there is Miss Cobb, state librarian of Georgia, who has held that position in that state for fifteen years, and the lady who is state librarian of Tennessee has been in office sixteen years, and I am told the state librarian of Louisiana, a lady, has seen nearly twenty-five years service in that position. No sir, the gentleman is mistaken."

Miss Plunkett was liberally applauded for the bravery she displayed in replying so spiritedly to the New Yorker. It was the general opinion that the Mississippi woman, to use a slang expression, "got the goat" of New York's dignified librarian.

Miss Plunkett is back in Jackson, and says her stay in the national capital was one of great pleasure and profit. She affiliated with the National Association of Law Libraries, which met at the same time as the State Libraries association.

Looking Back: The State Library in History

From the *Jackson Daily News*, Wednesday, June 3, 1914

Miss Mattie Plunkett Gets New Yorker's Goat – Librarian of Mississippi Denies Charge Elections 'Beauty Contests'

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Library Exhibit at MS Book Festival

The second annual Mississippi Book Festival was held August 20, 2016 on the Capitol Lawn. Over two hundred authors participated. CSPAN carried live feed of certain panels. Thousands of attendees were able to listen to panels, take tours of the Capitol, have books signed, and visit with Exhibitors.

The Library participated as an Exhibitor this year with Stephen Parks, State Librarian, being available to speak with attendees. The Library's exhibit table included handouts on the history of the Library, the organization of the Mississippi judiciary, and the Library's policies. Parks spoke to approximately one hundred twenty individuals who stopped by the table to learn more about the State Library. Parks is glad the Library was able to participate this year as the overwhelming majority of those stopping by the table had never heard of the State Library. Many of those who stopped by asked Parks if he was a law student or if the State Library was the Law Library of Mississippi State University.

The Library hopes to participate again next year.



“Missing” Artwork, Previously on Display in the Library, Located

by Stephen Parks

As we get closer to Mississippi’s Bicentennial in 2017, I have been researching the Library’s past in hopes that a history of the Library could be compiled. Recently, I came across this letter from Jefferson Davis in the Mississippi Senate Journal of 1880:

“Dear Sir – The late Mrs. Sarah A. Dorsey, a few days before her decease, instructed me to present to her native State, Mississippi, the crayon portrait which accompanies this letter. It was made after a photographic likeness of myself, which was taken in the identical clothes worn when I was captured ... Faithfully yours, Jefferson Davis” August 14, 1879

Upon receiving the portrait, Governor J.M. Stone delivered it to the Legislature by letter, also in the Mississippi Senate Journal of 1880:

“To the Senate and House of Representatives: Gentlemen - On the 15th of October 1879, I received per express, a crayon portrait of the Honorable Jefferson Davis, presented to the State of Mississippi by the late Mrs. Sarah A. Dorsey, of Harrison County ... The portrait has been placed in the State Library, and is subject to the action of your Honorable Body ... Respectfully, J.M. Stone, Governor” February 9, 1880

The portrait was put on display in the State Library with newspapers reporting the activity:

“The State Library has been recently adorned with a large portrait, in crayon, of Hon. Jefferson Davis – the gift to the State of the late Mrs. Sarah Dorsey. The portrait was executed by Mrs. M. Ellis, of New Orleans, and competent judges say that as a likeness and a work of art they have seldom seen its equal.” The Weekly Clarion, October 22, 1879

The Legislature, upon reconvening in 1880, passed an official Resolution in regards to the portrait:

“Resolved further, That the Librarian and Keeper of the Capitol take charge of said portrait and hang it in a suitable place in the State Library, and that the autograph letter of ex-President Davis be framed and preserved, with said portrait.”

Walking through the Library today in 2016, it is obvious that this portrait is no longer on display. If not in the Library, then where? I decided to try to locate its whereabouts.

I first contacted the Mississippi Department of Archives & History. The Museum Division responded that, while they did have a portrait of Jefferson Davis, they had never heard of anything resembling the crayon portrait from 1879. The Archives and Library Division also responded that they had not heard of anything like this portrait.

I then contacted staff at the New Capitol and received essentially the same response.

In the meantime, I located the a printing of the original portrait in The Papers of Jefferson Davis. As the crayon portrait is based off of this original portrait, I decided to send this find to the Archives and Capitol just to update them on my research.

After seeing this printing of the original portrait, the staff at the Department of Archives searched again and determined that they in fact do have the crayon portrait previously displayed in the Library.

The Department of Archives believes it has been in its collection since at least 1962. However, they have no record of any known donor or donation date. It's anyone's guess as to when it was removed from the State Library.

Below: The printing of the original portrait in The Papers of Jefferson Davis and the crayon portrait currently stored in the Department of Archives.



On Left: The Papers of Jefferson Davis: June 1865 – Decemeber 1870, by Jefferson Davis, Lynda Lasswell Crist, Suzanne Scott Gibbs, LSU Press, 2008, page 184e

Library Mentioned in Blog

After people finish touring the Capitol across the street, they oftentimes will walk over to the Gartin Building. Just recently, Library staff provided a tour to a couple from Denmark. We in the Library enjoy giving these tours and telling the story of the State Library.

Megan Dyson, currently living in the UK, visited Mississippi over the summer. Megan, her husband, and her sister Amanda Lyons, a Historian working for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, stopped in to see the Courtrooms and the State Library. Below is an excerpt from Megan's blog "notes and marks."

"My sister took us to visit the Carroll Gartin Justice building which houses the Mississippi Supreme Court and the Mississippi Law Library. The building is a stunning, grandiose neo-Classical behemoth completed in 2006. We took a peek in the beautiful courtrooms (I pretended I was in Law & Order) and we were given a tour of the State Law Library by the Librarian Stephen Parks. He defied all librarian stereotypes by being young, male and super friendly. The library is old school...I'm talking wooden desks, light gently filtering through big windows, brass sconces, and beautifully bound law books everywhere. The library serves all the State Courts, law school students and the general public. Stephen pointed out a framed photograph of a Victorian looking lady and said this was Helen D. Bell, the first female state librarian and, if I remember correctly, the first female state employee. The policy in the 1800s was that a man would be elected law librarian and then appoint a woman to actually do the job – until 1896 when Bell was elected in her own name. Way to go 19th century Mississippi feminists!"

If you know of any group that would like a tour of the Library and Courtrooms, please tell them to give us a call. We'd be happy to show them around.

New Titles Added to the Collection

Mississippi Government & Politics: Modernizers versus Traditionalists, Dale Krane, JK 4616 .K73 1992

The Debt Collector's Handbook: Collection Debts, Finding Assets, Enforcing Judgments, and Beating Your Creditors, David J. Cook, KF 1024 .C66 2014

Legal Reference for Librarians: How and Where to Find the Answers, Paul D. Healey, KF 240 .H38 2014

The Construction Lawyer's Guide to Labor & Employment Law, KF 3580 .C6 C48 2016

Kurzban's Immigration Law Sourcebook: A Comprehensive Outline and Reference Tool, Ira J. Kurzban, KF 4819.3 .K87 2016

A Practical Guide to Commercial Real Estate Transactions: From Contract to Closing, Gregory M. Stein, KF 665 .S73 2016

Mastering the Art of Depositions, Sawnie A. McEntire, KF 8900 .M387 2016

Mississippi Limitations of Actions, Thomas B. Walter, KFM 6690 .L5 W33 2016-2017

Mississippi DUI Law & Practice, Victor W. Carmody, KFM 6897.8 .C37 @016-2017

We in the State Library Wish You All a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

