Caroliniana Columns - Spring 2009

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Thomas F. McNally was named dean of libraries at the University of South Carolina’s Columbia campus on March 1. McNally had served the libraries as interim dean since July 1, 2007, and as director of Thomas Cooper Library from 1991 to 2007.

Commenting on the University Libraries and his plans for the future McNally said, “I am honored and humbled to follow in the footsteps of so many individuals who have done so much for our University.

“The University Libraries plays a key role in the process of teaching, learning, and research. The South Caroliniana Library is one of the jewels of the library system, holding, as it does, unique and invaluable materials pertaining to the history, literature, and culture of the state. I look forward to working with the library staff members and the members of the University South Caroliniana Society to further develop these wonderful collections and to facilitate the access of researchers to these treasures.”

McNally holds a Bachelor of Science degree in education from Kent State University and a Master of Library Science degree from the University of Washington. Before coming to the University, McNally held librarian positions at Loyola University of Chicago, Ohio State University, and the University of Michigan.

“AUTHORS OF THE UNITED STATES”

Shown is an engraving by A.H. Ritchie of Thomas Hicks, “Authors of the United States,” created in 1866. This print is a set piece showing stylized portraits of noted American authors in a classical setting with statues of Goethe, Shakespeare, and Dante looking down from an upper balcony.

William Cullen Bryant and Washington Irving are prominently displayed, left to right, at the center table, which is presided over by a standing James Fenimore Cooper. In all, there are portraits of 35 men and nine women, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Gilmore Simms, Henry Ward Beecher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stone, and Margaret Fuller.
By Allen Stokes

The South Caroliniana Library’s Micrographics Division currently microfilms 32 South Carolina newspapers ranging in frequency of publication from weeklies like the McCormick Messenger to dailies like the Gaffney Ledger. Producing microfilm copies of South Carolina newspapers is a service to local libraries, which often order copies of the microfilm. Microfilming frees up valuable storage space in the South Caroliniana Library and in local libraries. The newsprint on which current newspapers are published has a limited shelf life. Microfilming preserves the vital information in this resource for current and future generations of researchers. Newspapers are often the principal resource for anyone researching the history of a community.

The society’s recent purchase of additional Robert Barnwell Rhett papers has significantly enhanced this important collection. During the year, the library has received additions to the Wilfred Hardy Callcott collection; 116 volumes (registers of students) from the Columbia City Schools, 1893–1919; 43.75 linear feet of research files pertaining to military aviation (from Gilbert S. Guinn); and a letter from William Sidney Mullins, 1861, pertaining to the First Battle of Manassas. The library has recently processed additions to the William Blanding (1773–1857) collection, an extensive collection of papers of the Phillips and Hudson families of Greenville County (1790–1924, 1983), and a collection of papers of the Sinkler family (with connections to the Richardson, Manning, Gaillard, and Broun families), 1790–1924, 1983.

Of particular importance in recessionary times is that the society continues its level of financial support. Our recent appeal resulted in a number of special gifts, one of several thousands of dollars. I have asked the membership to consider bequests, a process, which I know, takes time. The society’s endowment has fared better than the general market, for which we can be thankful. At the end of February it stood at $1,798,933.96.

We concluded the year with two grand events. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Beattie, the library conducted an exhibition (papers pertaining to the Georgetown area) and reception at Hopsewee, the beautiful home of Thomas Lynch Jr., near Georgetown on April 30. Our annual meeting on May 9 drew a crowd in excess of 150 to hear Dr. Drew Gilpin Faust, president of Harvard University.

Best wishes to all.

Report from the President

By Robert K. Ackerman

As we conclude another academic year it is appropriate to review the progress of the University South Caroliniana Society and the South Caroliniana Library. The society’s membership now stands at 1,591, and it continues to support the library by obtaining gifts of historical records and by providing the finances to underwrite purchases.

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Report from the Director

By Allen Stokes

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In addition to filming current files, the South Caroliniana Library collaborates with local libraries and historical societies to do retrospective filming when gaps in our files can be filled by holdings in other repositories. A current library project involves collaboration with the Presbyterian College Archives and the Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga. The Southern Presbyterian was arguably the most important publication of the Presbyterian Church in the South during the 19th century. The weekly paper was established in Milledgeville, Ga., in 1847, moved to Charleston in 1852, to Columbia in 1861, and to Clinton in 1893. The paper ceased publication in 1908. While there are gaps in the holdings of the three participating institutions, the filming project will enhance the accessibility of this important publication for historians, genealogists, and persons researching the history of local churches. The two institutions participating with the South Caroliniana Library will receive complimentary copies of the microfilm. The Caroliniana also microfilms the records of churches and makes the microfilm available at the library for researchers.

The South Caroliniana Library has been microfilming newspapers and other records for well over 50 years. Our Micrographics Division is staffed by two microfilm technicians who operate three Kodak MRD-2 planetary cameras. The film is processed by the micrographics lab at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and must meet stringent quality control standards. The camera negative is stored in the vault at the archives, and the library receives a duplicating negative and a positive copy for readers. The duplicating negative is stored at the University Libraries Annex.

The Micrographics Division of the South Caroliniana Library has preserved millions of pages of South Carolina newspapers and other records. More researchers consult the newspaper collection than any other single resource in the South Caroliniana Library.
When I arrived on the University of South Carolina campus as a graduate student in 1960, I had a lot to learn. In truth, I was not quite sure how I had gotten to the University. After graduating from Wofford College, I applied to USC to pursue a graduate degree in American history simply because I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. It was probably only because of providence and a gracious recommendation by my Wofford professor, Dr. Lewis P. Jones, that USC awarded me a fellowship to serve as a teaching assistant in the Department of History.

“AN INEXPERIENCED AND MODERATE SOUTHERNER”

In nearly all respects, I was an inexperienced and moderate Southerner, no different from many other young people coming of age at that time. I did, however, have a deep interest in current affairs and was developing a perspective on politics and race that was somewhat more open than many other students. As a junior at Wofford, I had taken my first trip out of the region as one of three South Carolina students participating in the Methodist Student Movement’s Christian Citizenship Seminar in New York City and Washington, D.C. It was on this trip that, for the first time, I sat next to and shared a meal with an African-American student.

In my senior year at Wofford, I took the Contemporary History course led by Dr. Jones. Each meeting of the class was in the college library, where we learned about the purpose and points of view of a wide range of news and opinion periodicals, ranging from Human Events to The Nation. During my last semester, a fraternity brother and I conducted a campus survey of students’ preferences regarding presidential candidates and integration of public schools.

Upon my arrival at USC, I was mortified to find that the University housing office had assigned a mere freshman to be my roommate, probably because his father was a college dean. I was desperate to identify other students with whom I might have more in common. I conceived the tactic of laying out magazines to which I was subscribing—The New Republic, The Reporter, The Progressive, and others—on the radiator in the study area of my room. Then I opened, and kept open, the door to the hallway that other students used to access the other five dorm rooms in the building. The magazines were clearly visible to anyone who passed by the door and looked into the room.

It was not long before two students came in, introduced themselves, and commented on my magazines. They were Selden Smith and Charles “Chaz” Joyner who shared a room on the third floor. Both were some years older than I, having completed military service, and both were deeply engaged in their doctoral work in American history. In the months that followed, we developed friendships that have endured for more than four decades.
what we could do to help, Carter replied, “Sit-in!” At his direction, we walked down Main Street to Woolworth’s. As we did so, a man walking some distance in front of us quickly turned, whipped out a camera from under his coat, and took our picture. We later learned the photographer was an agent of the State Law Enforcement Division. At Woolworth’s we took our seats at the lunch counter but neither the African American students nor we were served. There was no incident. The next day the *Charlotte Observer* ran a small story on the sit-in, making much of the fact that two unnamed white men had participated.

Several days later, University administrators ordered us to meet with them. We found ourselves before two feared icons of the history department, Dr. Robert Wienefeld, dean of The Graduate School, and Dr. Wilfred Callcott, dean of the University. They were calm but firm: the University wanted “agitators of neither stripe” on campus. Nevertheless, they let us off with only a reprimand.

When we told Chaz Joyner about what happened, he quickly penned what is probably the only civil rights song composed with tongue planted firmly in cheek. Chaz would go on to earn separate doctorates in both folklore and history, and his “Ballad of Smith and Mizell” incorporated the hyperbole and myth that characterizes the folk tradition:

Once there were two student boys,  
Selden Smith and Hayes Mizell.  
They took part in a sit-in strike.  
Dean Callcott gave them hell.  
They were down to the dime store.  
Dave Carter they did see.  
They took part in a dangerous thing.  
Thank God it wasn’t me!  
They walked over to the lunch counter  
To get a bite to eat.  
Sixty minutes later they  
Were still sitting on that seat.

The waitress would not serve them  
Although their skins were white.  
“Why don’t you let them niggers  
fight their own damn fight?”  
But the two brave men they would not move  
For they learned a long time ago  
That no one’s free till everyone’s free  
And they told the *Charlotte Observer* so.
At the end of the academic year, the University terminated my assistantship, probably more because of my mediocre performance as a graduate student than because of my modest activism. However, through the kind intervention of Dr. Robert Ochs, chair of the history department, I was able to secure the position of clerk at the South Carolina Archives Department. At the same time, Selden, Chaz, and I moved into an off-campus apartment where Dan T. Carter, an undergraduate history student in his senior year, joined us.

“DESEGREGATION ON THE HORIZON”

During the next two years, I pursued my graduate studies part-time while continuing my participation in the SCSCHR. As litigation on behalf of African American plaintiffs seeking admission to the University proceeded through the courts, it was clear desegregation was on the horizon. Riots accompanying James Meredith’s enrollment in the University of Mississippi in October 1962 provided a cautionary example of what might occur if South Carolina moderates were silent. In November 1962, a colleague at the archives department, Robert K. Ackerman (also a history doctoral student at the University), and I coauthored a letter to the editor of The Gamecock, warning: “What matters now is whether students of the University of South Carolina choose to act as rational and mature adults or as irrational hoodlums with pop bottles.”

I was also one of a small group of University students, all active in the SCSCHR, who created a new organization, the Student Committee to Observe Order and Peace (SCOOP). I wrote the organization’s statement of purpose, which concluded that SCOOP was “for the sole purpose of promoting the peaceful observance of any future court decision in regard to [any desegregation case].” Later, as chair of the SCSCHR Citizenship Project Committee, I urged students to write to Governor-elect Donald Russell because “Your call for an intelligent, reasonable, and Christian approach to the problems which must be faced will support him in any moderate, law-abiding stand which he may desire to take.”

“A CRUCIBLE FOR LEARNING”

By late 1962, I understood that I had neither the patience nor talent to pursue history as a career. My out-of-class education both on and off campus, combined with my tenuous involvement in the remote periphery of the civil rights movement, led me to seek other career paths I could only dimly perceive. In 1963, I left the University without a degree, but thankful for it as a crucible for learning and associations that serve me well to this day.

—M. Hayes Mizell retired in 2003 as director of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation’s Program for Disadvantaged Youth. He is a member of the University South Caroliniana Society’s Executive Council.

The South Caroliniana Library is the repository of the “M. Hayes Mizell Papers, 1952–.” The collection consists of about 165 linear feet of records covering Mizell’s education and career from 1952 to the present. Included are materials about his personal life, American Friends Service Committee, Richland County School District #1, National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children, State Employment Initiatives for Youth, and Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, as well as speeches, writings, topical files, reference materials, audiovisual materials, and ephemera.

Processing of the papers was made possible through a gift from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. A comprehensive finding aid to the collection is available to users via the South Caroliniana Library Web site.
University Archives

By Elizabeth West, University Archivist

The University Archives is the institution’s repository of permanent, historically valuable materials. The University archivist works with campus offices, including those of the president, provost, and Board of Trustees, to identify records of permanent value. Once the archives acquires such records, the materials are prepared for use by researchers; this includes the removal of extraneous or nonpermanent materials, the creation of a finding aid, and the creation of a catalog entry.

The archives operates a records management program that regulates the retention and destruction of nonpermanent records throughout the University system. The records program operates under the authority of the South Carolina Public Records Act. In addition to legal considerations, the benefits of a records management program include the efficient use of office space, improved information retrieval, protection and preservation of permanent, confidential and vital records, and proper documentation of the disposition of records that may be required for audits, investigations, or lawsuits. The University Archivist assesses the office’s records management needs, inventories records, identifies vital and archival records, and establishes authorized retention and disposition schedules. The program also helps identify permanent records to be transferred to the archives’ collections.

Finding the Perfect Home

By Harriet Sinkler Little

Most of us have documents that we treasure—letters, wills, plats, maps, land records, etc. For genealogists, this is our lifeblood and we guard our cache fiercely. But how do we protect these documents? And how do we insure that they will be properly cared for when we are gone? Some of us have family members who share our interests and are willing to devote time and energy to the conservation of our treasures. But many of us are less fortunate.

One obvious solution is to donate the documents to a repository that is equipped to conserve them. South Carolina is fortunate in having several organizations devoted to this cause, but in my mind, one stands out above the rest. I would like to share a personal experience with you.

I persuaded family members to join me in donating our combined family documents for safekeeping, and I undertook the task of determining the most appropriate place. After a couple of false starts, one library encouraged me to donate our material, based on some of my inventory lists and samples. I was told that they would be happy to accept the material we brought to them and provide a receipt, but it was my responsibility to have the documents appraised for tax purposes. There were other factors that made me skeptical, so I kept searching, and ultimately I was referred to Dr. Allen Stokes, director of the South Caroliniana Library on the USC campus in Columbia.

Let me tell you about my first contact with Dr. Stokes. When I called his office, I was NOT confronted with a menu, or a secretary, or voice mail. He answered his own telephone! I thought this must have been a fluke, but when I recovered from the shock, I described our collection, and he immediately said he would like to come to Summerville to look at it. Furthermore, he described a recently acquired collection from a related family, which he felt would make it even more important that our documents come to the Caroliniana. He was extremely helpful in explaining the appraisal process and said the library would work with me in accordance with accepted best practices and IRS protocols. And they would provide copies of any documents that I needed. All the right answers!

Dr. Stokes and a coworker visited to look at the collection and discuss in more detail how the process would work. They would have accepted the documents unsorted, but I felt that I needed to know exactly what was being contributed; therefore, I spent considerable time resorting and labeling files. I was pleased to learn that the University has a conservation laboratory capable of copying a book without damaging the spine or leaving the black mark in the center of the copy.

The South Caroliniana Library can be said to have had its beginning about a century ago with the collecting of manuscripts, but officially it began in its present location in 1940. The University designated it as “the South Caroliniana Library, a new institution charged with the task of documenting the history and literature of the Palmetto State.” Its stated mission is “to acquire, preserve, and disseminate published and unpublished South Carolina-related material.” (For more specific information, see www.sc.edu.library/socar.)

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When James Henry Rice Jr. wrote to Eugene Whitefield Dabbs in June of 1926, “… I am, nonetheless, grateful that my youth was passed in royalty and that I was born in the purple, amid the landed gentry of his Late Majesty’s Province of South Carolina, as you were,” Eugene Dabbs must have known he had passed the test. He most certainly was not born “in the purple,” as Rice observed, but “He worked hard both because he was trained to work and because as a landless newcomer to an aristocratic community he had to succeed” (The Road Home by James McBride Dabbs). One of his favorite quotes was that of Andrew Jackson: “Every man is as good as every other man, and maybe a darn sight better.”

His Youth

Eugene Whitefield Dabbs was the oldest son of Civil War veteran John Quincy Adams Dabbs (1825–1880) and Elizabeth Euphrasia Hoole Dabbs (1826–1919). Despite the fact that her husband was a staunch and outspoken member of Black Creek Baptist Church, Euphrasia, who was a devoted member of First Presbyterian Church of Darlington, S.C., strongly impressed the Presbyterian doctrines on her two sons. As a result, most of the descendants of Eugene W. Dabbs still remain within the folds of their matriarch’s chosen faith.

Born on April 15, 1864, Eugene Whitefield Dabbs lived with his parents and a younger brother, James Hoole Dabbs (1865–1885), in the Darlington community on acreage which is believed to have been
south of Black Creek. Eugene was probably named after his mother’s brother, Eugene Samuel Hoole, who had moved to Alabama, and the traveling evangelist George Whitefield whose religious views were part of the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 40s. The family remained in Darlington until the father died in 1880. Eugene had started his first year of studies in journalism at the University of South Carolina, but the death of his father brought him back home to take care of his mother and younger brother. His love for writing, however, remained with him throughout his lifetime. Much of the history of this family is preserved in the hundreds of letters and manuscripts, many written by Eugene, that are preserved in the South Caroliniana Library.

At the time of John Quincy Adams Dabbs’ death (following the Civil War and Reconstruction) the finances of the family were in such disarray that Eugene Dabbs wrote that his mother was advised to send her oldest son out into the world to work and place her youngest son in an orphanage so that she might obtain a housekeeper’s position to provide room and board for herself. He quotes her response as being, “No, to the limits of my strength I will keep a home for those whom God has given me.” About two years later, when Eugene Dabbs was 18, the family, including mother, two sons, and Euphrasia’s mother, Elizabeth Stanley Hoole, packed up its belongings and moved to the Privateer Section of Sumter County where they rented a farm.

In a letter written Jan. 13, 1882, and postmarked Sumter, S.C., Euphrasia states, “We have the most comfortable house I have ever lived in. We have plenty of room indoors but the outbuildings are in a very dilapidated condition. Then we are so far from church and any depot. If Mother is well enough for me to leave her and the weather permits Eugene and I propose going to Wedgefield church next Sunday. It is eight to ten miles but Sumter will be our church for the next two years, I think.” In fact, it would remain their church for 11 years.

During those years, the family would lose Eugene’s brother, James, who died in 1885 at the age of 20, and Grandmother Hoole, who died in 1887. Eugene fared poorly at his initial attempts at farming. Eventually he and his mother moved down to the Salem Black River Community east of the Black River Swamp in Sumter County where he accepted a job as an overseer for the Witherspoon family. Prior to leaving, however, he made a proposal of marriage to Susan (Sudie) Miller Furman.

Sudie Furman was the daughter of Dr. John Howard Furman and Susan Emma Miller Furman of Cornhill Plantation in the Privateer Section of Sumter County. Her great-grandfather was Dr. Richard Furman, president of the first Baptist Convention in America, who laid the groundwork for the establishment of Furman Theological University. Her grandfather was Dr. Samuel Furman, a professor at Furman Theological University. Her maternal grandfather was Col. John B. Miller, the first master in equity in the Sumter District. She came with a high pedigree and her father, accordingly, saw very little that Mr. Eugene W. Dabbs had to offer his daughter. He denied their request to marry.

MARRIAGE TO ALICE MAUDE MCBRIDE

After moving to the Salem Black River Community located approximately 10 miles southeast of Mayesville, S.C., Eugene Dabbs began courting Alice Maude McBride. The McBride family were long-standing members of the community dating back to Samuel McBride (1782–1850). Samuel moved from Williamsburg County and began working as a foreman on the farm of Sarah Bradley James, the widow of state legislator John Ervin James, the widow of state legislator John Ervin James. Samuel married Sarah James and, after her death, added to her 500 acres until the farm totaled more than 7,500 acres stretching seven miles along what is now Highway 378 east of Salem Black River Swamp. McBride was a farmer of unusual ability, and he soon became a man of note and prominence. His plantation, known as Egypt Farms, was considered a model showplace, and the corner of Highways 378 and 527 was known as McBride’s Corner.

Samuel McBride and his second wife, Martha Ruberry McBride, had one son, James Samuel McBride (1841–1864), who died of tuberculosis at the age of 23. Prior to his death, however, young James McBride, married, fathered two children, and built Rip Raps Plantation to replace his parents’ home. His young widow, Sophronia Warren McBride (1839–1915), and his two children, Alice Maude (1860–1908) and Guy Warren (1864–1914), struggled to keep this plantation going for the next 51 years. Sophronia received help from her father, Guy Lewis Warren (1810–1875), and her brothers and sisters from Jonesboro, Ga., who moved to Rip Raps during the Civil War. Sophronia’s son completed a degree in mathematics at the University of South Carolina and, declining an offer to teach at the University, returned to Rip Raps to help his mother. He never married. Her daughter became the first wife of Eugene Dabbs on Feb. 7, 1893, in a wedding service held at Rip Raps.
Maude McBride Dabbs brought one-third of the McBride estate with her when she married. The young couple moved into the then-one-story house on Highway 527 just north of the Crossroads, where, for the next 13 years they farmed and reared their six children.

Concerns for the children's health prompted them to build a primitive structure (which they called “the camp”) less than a mile back into the pinewoods but further away from the swamp. Here they lived during the two years it took to build a new home they would call Fern Park.

On March 29, 1907, Eugene Dabbs wrote, “After several years of consideration we decided to leave our Egypt Farm home on the Black River road and move out here in the pinelands on account of the health of our children and last year decided the change would have to be made. On May 15, 1906, we moved into the camp, which is a cheap structure of boards and very uncomfortable in hot weather, but was comfortable in the winter. The barn is the building used at Egypt Farm 11 years as the Goodwill Postoffice.”

The “miasma” that hovered over the swamp, usually in the mornings, and drifted out over the bordering fields was believed to carry fever and sickness that was particularly devastating to children under five. In future years, the disease would be named malaria from the Italian words mala and aria meaning “bad air.” Although Dr. Carlos J. Finley of Cuba theorized that both yellow fever and malaria were transmitted by mosquitoes, it wasn’t until Dr. Walter Reed proved this theory through controlled experiments in the early 1900s that efforts were made to extinguish mosquito populations in order to control the two diseases. Since mosquitoes rarely travel more than a mile away from their water source, the decision to move to “the camp” back in the woods proved to be a prudent one on the part of Eugene and Maude.

While protecting her children from malaria, Maude herself would not escape serious illness. At the age of 47, prior to the family’s move into their new home, she died of typhoid fever. Eugene was heard to whisper over her grave, “My God, I killed her.”

Not a great deal of information has been passed on about the personality of Maude McBride Dabbs. Her second son, James McBride Dabbs, writes in his book The Road Home that while they were driven by their father, they revolved around their mother. In letters of sorrow following her death, she was described as a sweet, dainty woman, noble, pure, and a devoted parent. Ruth Lawrence wrote from Darlington, “Dear Cousin Eugene, I used to wonder how one woman could accomplish so much in her quick way and never get upset. Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Maude’s tremendous legacy to the Dabbs family, her six children included: Eugene Whitefield Dabbs Jr. (1894–1945), James McBride Dabbs (1896–1970), Elizabeth Gertrude Dabbs (1898–1975), Sophie McBride Dabbs (1900–1984), Thomas Hoole Dabbs (1902–1911) and Guy McBride Dabbs (1904–1983). The descendants of Eugene Whitefield Dabbs and Maude McBride Dabbs are here today only because the one surviving child of John Quincy Adams Dabbs (Eugene Whitefield Dabbs) and the only child of James Samuel McBride to have children (Maude McBride Dabbs) passed on the Dabbs/McBride heritage through their offspring.

Upon her death, Maude McBride Dabbs also left a significant amount of land divided between her husband and children. Within seven years after Maude’s death, her only surviving brother and her mother both died, leaving Eugene W. Dabbs as the executor for the remaining land and Rip Raps, the family home of the McBrides. This large transfer of land initiated the name change from McBride’s Corner to Dabbs Crossroads, and the passing of James McBride’s name into history.
MARRIAGE TO SUSAN MILLER FURMAN

Following the death of his wife, Maude, Eugene Whitefield Dabbs began to again court Susan (Sudie) Miller Furman. After her father’s refusal to allow Sudie to marry Eugene more than 20 years earlier, Sudie dutifully obeyed her parents’ wishes and remained at home taking care of them until the death of her father in 1902. She then traveled extensively to visit friends and became involved with the Mary Hanley Society of Bethel, a Women’s Mission Society located in Society Hill. In 1903, she went to Cuba for a brief time as a missionary, but returned to South Carolina to nurse her brother, McDonald Furman, until his death. Sudie then went into training as a nurse at the Baker-Dick Infirmary (now Tuomey Hospital in Sumter, S.C.) and, in 1907, went to Bellevue Hospital in New York City for postgraduate work. In fall 1908, she returned to Sumter and, accepted a position as city nurse, which she held for a year and a half.

On the back of an old picture postcard of farmland from Egypt Farms is written, “Miss Sudie Furman, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year 50,000 lbs. Hay of finest quality, peanuts & grass from 30 acres. Can Cuba or Cornhill beat ‘Egypt’? E.W.D.” Since there is not a date, it is not known when Eugene Whitefield Dabbs sent this picture postcard to Sudie, but one would expect it was after the death of Maude and obviously after Sudie returned from Cuba. Regardless, Sudie kept the card and would later bring it back with her to be saved in the attic at Fern Park. It is said that when she heard that Maude had died, she knew exactly where she would be spending the rest of her life.

Eugene Whitefield Dabbs and Susan Miller Furman were married on March 8, 1910. Overnight, she became the mother to Maude McBride’s six children, the youngest 6 and the oldest 16. Young E.W. Dabbs Jr. left home at this time to attend Donaldson Military Academy in Fayetteville, N.C. The fifth child, Thomas, died of pneumonia in 1911.

The remaining children lived together in Fern Park, approximately three-fourths of a mile back in the woods off of Highway 378. It is said that Dabbs had three gates that visitors had to pass through in order to arrive at the house. He stated that if any suitor could master access to all three gates, then he might court one of his daughters. Only one daughter married, and that was after Eugene Dabbs’ death.

RECORDS AND CORRESPONDENCE

The notes and letters of Eugene W. Dabbs reveal a man involved in a wide variety of activities and provide an in-depth history of issues surrounding farming during this period in South Carolina. Dabbs kept detailed records on small notepads and recorded every item he bought or sold from a loaf of bread to a pig. One record shows more than 34 rental properties, including tenant farms, acreage, and fishing permits to the Black River Swamp. He was extremely involved in local and state politics. He served as secretary of the Sumter County Agriculture Society and of the Sumter County Farmers Alliance, and as vice president and president of the Sumter County Farmers Union. He was also a member of the Cotton Board Association, the National Farmers Union Committee, and the Cotton Seed Division of the Food Administration. In addition, he served in the S.C. Legislature for two years beginning in 1906, was a member of the Sumter County Democratic Executive Committee, was clerk of the Board of School Trustees for 25 years, and was a deacon and treasurer of Salem Black River Presbyterian Church. He ran unsuccessfully for commissioner of agriculture, commerce and industries in 1924, during which time, he and James Henry Rice Jr. began an ongoing correspondence of mutual admiration.

In an exchange of letters between Hugh Humphreys of the Dixie Brand Cotton Seed Meal in Memphis, Tenn., and Dabbs, Humphreys confirmed his view that politics pretty much remained the same when he wrote on April 15, 1921, “Apparently the Democrats must oppose any measure offered by the Republicans although it may be for the best interest of the country that such measure passes. I observe this morning Senator Cochran states that on account of the tariff—largely designed to protect the American producers—that we will have soup kitchens; whereas there is enough grain and meats in the United States to last about two years, not to mention our supply of cotton, etc. However, these Democrats—although mostly from the producing territory—would have the country flooded with oriental oils and oriental produce produced by Coolie labor, because in some years past we followed the wrong theory. I think you will agree that a wise man changes and a fool never does.”

Letters and stories surrounding Eugene W. Dabbs reveal a man of determination with a temper to match. It was said that his second
wife, known to all as Mother Sudie, would gently take his hand when he would lose his temper and calmly say, “Now, now, Father. Not to upset yourself,” and he would refrain from further accusations, although not necessarily stop fuming. Several of his letters start with an apology such as, “I wish to apologize for my ill-use of words at our last meeting.”

When he agreed to allow the train company to lay tracks across his land only if they always closed the gates after they passed so that the cows would not stray, they failed to keep their end of the agreement. One of his sons quotes him as calling to his two oldest boys one day in a fit of rage, “Grab your guns, boys, we’re going to hold up a train.” And that he did. Ordering the engineers and passengers out at gunpoint, he sent them all walking back to Mayesville, and he confiscated the train until court action finally ensued.

His debates with the minister and other members of the Presbyterian Session are legendary. As a deacon of the church, he exchanged several letters of disagreement with the Reverend Workman, one of which was a suggestion on the part of the pastor that Mr. Dabbs might wish to consider joining another church. It is said that after one particularly argumentative session meeting where Mr. Dabbs and a Mr. Muldrow failed to reach an agreement, the minister asked Mr. Dabbs to offer a closing prayer at the end of the church service in hopes of calming tempers. “Dear Lord,” Dabbs prayed, “Please help the misguided Muldrows to see the errors of their ways.”

And yet, letters to his sons and daughters reveal a much softer man with a tender love. On May 7, 1915, he wrote to his son James who was at the University of South Carolina, “I hope your dear Mother can see how fine you are—how handsome—and what a credit she is. Pray for her prayers and training and blood—for blood will tell—you are.” To his daughter Elizabeth, who was away at Columbia University, he wrote on Aug. 21, 1921, “If I had a million dollars to give you it would not represent my love, so I am just writing this little note to tell you that I cannot say how much I love you, how much your beautiful life has been to me these years that are so rapidly passing.”

**HIS LEGACY**

Eugene Whitefield Dabbs died May 31, 1933, at 69 years of age, waiting for breakfast. He had dressed, said good morning to his youngest son, Guy McBride, and gone to the piazza to look across the fields. When his son went to get him five minutes later, he was dead, sitting upright in a rocker, his walking stick hung over the arm and his head slumped forward. After struggling with debt his entire life, he left none. In addition, approximately 7,500 acres of land remained in the Dabbs family and his three sons and two daughters had become well-educated adults. All of his children remained at the Crossroads to live their lives supported by the land. His second son, James McBride Dabbs, became an author in his own right and was noted throughout the country as a strong advocate within the civil rights movement of the 1960s. There are currently 132 direct descendents of Eugene Whitefield Dabbs and Maude McBride Dabbs, of whom 117 are living today throughout the United States and abroad.

Eugene Whitefield Dabbs had the benefit of only one year of university education, a fact which he regretted his entire life. With the encouragement and financial assistance of their stepmother, Sudie Furman, each of Eugene’s surviving children was able to attend not only a university, but also graduate school. Among them, the five children studied at The Citadel, the University of South Carolina, Winthrop College (now University), Columbia University in New York City, the University of Virginia, Southern Connecticut State University, and the Peabody Conservatory, now part of The Johns Hopkins University.

In his will Dabbs left $2,500 for a scholarship to Thornwell Orphanage in memory of his mother, Euphrasia Hoole Dabbs, and his son, Thomas Hoole Dabbs; $2,500 for a scholarship to be paid over to Connie Maxwell Orphanage in memory of his father, J. Quincy Dabbs and his aunt, Hannah E. Dabbs; $2,500 for a scholarship to Columbia Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in memory of his first wife, Maude McBride Dabbs; and $2,500 for a scholarship to be paid to Furman University in memory of his second wife, Susan Miller Furman. Regarding these scholarships, he wrote, “That all of said sums be held by the Trustees of the above institutions for the benefit of deserving boys and girls to the end that I may do something to furnish educational opportunities which were denied me by poverty, trusting that these scholarships may be a blessing to the people of my State.”

Eugene W. Dabbs also left a philosophical legacy (less tangible, but more enduring) to all of his descendents, which is evidenced in this statement made by Guy McBride Dabbs in 1979, “May future generations not forget the past. We do not own houses and lands and trees. We are only trustees.”

By Terry W. Lipscomb

During the formative years of the American federal republic, the quest to pick the site for the United States capital was arguably the nation’s biggest three-ring political circus. Kenneth R. Bowling described this episode at length in his 1991 book *The Creation of Washington, D.C.: The Idea and Location of the American Capital*. Reviewer Norman K. Risjord even compared the 1783–1790 seat of government contest to the maneuvers surrounding modern-day competition for a major league baseball franchise.¹

Although a number of South Carolinians figured in the federal city debate, the transplanted Irish aristocrat Pierce Butler was probably South Carolina’s foremost spokesman for the South’s interest in this affair, and his role deserves to be better known. Butler is the subject of my book *The Letters of Pierce Butler, 1790–1794: Nation Building and Enterprise in the New American Republic*, published by the University of South Carolina Press, 2007, with the support of the Caroline McKissick Dial Publications Fund. The following narrative draws on my research for that book, on Bowling’s publication, and on such sources as the *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*, The Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr, and Max Farrand’s *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*.

By the time Pierce Butler arrived on the national political scene, he had helped win a bitterly fought struggle over South Carolina’s seat of state government. An act of 1786 had set in motion a plan to remove the capital from the Atlantic port of Charleston and to build a planned capital city on the banks of the Congaree River in the geographic center of South Carolina. Charleston, the self-styled “metropolis” of the state, did not surrender political power without resorting to cutthroat tactics. Representatives from the port city worked to divide the opposition and create discord between upstate localities, and rival site promoters had their own clashes. Reportedly on one occasion both Thomas Sumter and Alexander Gillon appeared in the legislature packing swords.²

The 18th-century South Carolina backcountry possessed a strong Irish ethnic component, and in the Irish-born Butler the region found a political champion who would fight for a central capital. Butler supported the legislation that successfully established Columbia as the new seat of government.

The very next year, the General Assembly elected Butler a delegate to the 1787 Philadelphia convention that framed the Constitution of the United States. There his experience in state politics immediately colored his perception of the debate over the national seat of government. Impatient with Charleston’s pretensions to dominate South Carolina, he showed an equal lack of patience with the pretensions of New York and Philadelphia, the most clamorous self-appointed candidates to become the nation’s permanent capital.

George Mason of Virginia set off a seat-of-government debate among convention members when he suggested that the Constitution should forbid Congress from choosing any state capital such as Philadelphia or New York as the national capital. By putting these leading contenders out of the running, such a clause would raise the prospects for Mason’s beloved Potomac River. However, Gouverneur Morris hinted that ratification might proceed more smoothly if the delegates avoided antagonizing the two cities “which had expectations of becoming the Seat of the Genl. Govt.” Others then commented. Butler jumped in on Mason’s side and suggested the convention write a clause into the Constitution that would fix the place (and a central one) for the seat of the national government.³

As Southerners tended to favor a “geographic center,” perhaps Butler intended to push for a capital on the Potomac River. In terms of the 18th-century Atlantic seashore, the Potomac was considered the

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³ Ibid.
center of the country—the midpoint between the St. Croix River (the Maine-Canada boundary) and the St. Mary’s River (the Georgia-Spanish Florida boundary). In George Washington, the Potomac site had an even more powerful advocate than either Mason or Butler, though as convention chair, Washington held aloof from the debate.

In the ensuing months, ratification would prove a difficult enough business without stirring up jealousies over the seat of government. Butler’s fellow convention members wisely discounted his suggestion, and the final text of the Constitution dealt more discreetly with the issue. Article 1, section 8, paragraph 17 merely authorized Congress “To exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of Particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the Government of the United States.”

However, according to Butler’s later correspondence, paragraph 17 was adopted against his objections. On March 30, 1803, he would confide to Aaron Burr, “The selection of ‘ten miles square’ for the seat of government appeared to me at the time, and has continued, an excrescence on the Constitution like a wart on a fair skin.” Butler’s opposition to the doctrine of “exclusive jurisdiction” would set him apart from the hardcore Hamiltonian advocates of federal power in his attitude toward the District of Columbia.

In 1789 the South Carolina General Assembly elected Butler to the U.S. Senate, where once again he became involved in the seat-of-government debate. New York City was the nation’s temporary capital, but the Philadelphians still had other ideas. On May 24, 1790, Pennsylvania senator Robert Morris moved that Congress hold its next session in the city of Philadelphia. This sent Butler into frantic negotiations with both New Yorkers and the Potomac crowd. Before long, he succeeded in postponing Morris’s motion and he also introduced a “Bill to determine the permanent seat of Congress, and the government of the United States.” The Butler bill contained blanks for the temporary capital and the permanent capital.

The opposition to Philadelphia stemmed from the belief that if the city’s residents regained physical possession of the nation’s government even temporarily, they would do everything in their power to keep it and to sabotage any legislation for a permanent capital elsewhere. Furthermore, the South Carolina delegation had other grounds for prejudice against Philadelphia. With the Constitution no more than two years old, Philadelphia Quakers had already tried to defy or undo the document’s slavery compromises by petitioning Congress, and for this reason some of the South Carolinians may have deemed the city’s political climate unsuitable for the seat of government.

Fierce Butler’s own position is not quite so easy to pigeonhole. Clearly he had no intention of letting the Philadelphians upset plans for a permanent capital on the Potomac River, but his denunciation of the antislavery petitions did not imply any serious aversion to Quakers. County Carlow, his Irish birthplace, had a significant Quaker presence. Butler had been reared in the Church of Ireland, but his closest boyhood friends belonged to neighboring Quaker families, and as an adult he seemed to easily make new friends among Quakers from Britain and Jamaica. And most surprisingly of all, Butler’s status as a large slaveholder would not prevent him from finally selecting Philadelphia as his permanent residence in preference to Charleston, S.C., even though his residency risked bringing his personal notions about states’ rights and the Constitution into conflict with the laws of Pennsylvania.

The legislative stalemate that gripped Congress in the summer of 1790 tied up Butler’s residence bill along with Alexander Hamilton’s program for federal assumption of state debts. The ensuing “Compromise of 1790” that famously averted a national crisis is thought to have involved a trade-off wherein some Southerners dropped their opposition to assumption, while some Northerners dropped their opposition to a permanent capital on the Potomac. According to the time-honored account, the details were decided in the “Dinner Table Bargain,” an affair hosted at Thomas Jefferson’s New York residence on or around Sunday, 20 June, and attended by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison.

In general outline, this seems consistent with contemporary views of what happened, and in a letter of 25 May, Butler even referred to the anticipated bargaining when he likened the vote-trading over unrelated issues to a “praise the Lord and pass the ammunition” deal that had occurred in South Carolina during the American Revolution: “There is some manoeuvering to connect Assumption and Seat of Government. It puts me in mind of a measure of old Capt Buckle’s [Thomas Buckle, a Charleston merchant] during the war. He had got in some Gun Powder from Statia, which, as you may suppose, was in demand. He happened to have some old Bibles or Testaments from a former trade, which he connected in sale with the Powder. Just so are the Assumptionists doing with the future Seat of Congress.”

However, historical problems of this kind are often less simple than they seem, and the “Compromise of 1790” has generated some argument over what really happened. Did the agreement really deliver the vote on the residence bill, or did it just prevent New Englanders from scuttling the deal? And on closer examination, there seems to have been at least a three-way bargain in which New Englanders...
got assumption, Southerners got a permanent capital on the Potomac, and Philadelphians got the temporary capital away from New York, with an agreement to keep it for 10 years. The Philadelphia-Potomac deal proved crucial to the Senate vote, and a real breakthrough occurred on 30 June, when Butler, apparently frustrated at allowing Vice President John Adams to cast a tie-breaking vote, dropped his opposition to Philadelphia as the temporary capital and deserted the South Carolina-New York alliance.\(^\text{12}\)

This switch could have been prearranged with the Pennsylvania delegation but Butler’s ambivalent attitude toward Philadelphia may also have been a factor. An easy channel of communication certainly existed between Butler and the Philadelphians. Pennsylvania Congressional delegation leaders Robert Morris and Thomas Fitzsimons had served with Butler in the 1787 federal convention. Fitzsimons was a longtime business contact and, having been born and raised in southeastern Ireland, was Butler’s fellow countryman. Morris and Butler were next-door neighbors in New York City’s Dock Street, and they had mutual interests in land speculation.\(^\text{13}\)

The New Yorkers greeted the compromise with howls of rage, as Butler reported to George Mason in a letter of 25 July: “We Potowmack Gentlemen are abused in the New York papers, yet none I think so much as myself, as You will see by the morning Post [Morning Post and Daily Advertiser] of Yesterday. Why this unfounded abuse I know not, for my Enemys know I have been uniform and consistent, that I always declared that the permanent residence was my object; & that with me every thing consistent with Justice should yield to it; and for this the New York Prints abuse me, & invent things that were not, nor are not—such is the tribute We pay for entering into publick life.”\(^\text{14}\)

Actually, moving the temporary capital from New York to Philadelphia caused Butler a great deal of trouble and expense. He had taken a three-year lease on a posh New York residence at 37 Great Dock Street (now Pearl Street) and found himself obliged to pay off the lease in the midst of a serious personal financial crisis.\(^\text{15}\)

Interestingly, Butler did not favor locating the permanent capital in the Georgetown-Anacostia region on the Potomac—the actual site of Washington, D.C., but rather at a site on the eastern (Maryland) bank far up river near both the Pennsylvania and Virginia lines and convenient to the trans-Appalachian West. As the deadlock in the U.S. Senate began to break, Butler’s fellow senators overruled him, and the language of the bill got increasingly vague as to the location.\(^\text{16}\)

As finally enacted by Congress, Butler’s Residence Act of 1790 granted sweeping powers to President George Washington to lay out the federal district and erect the government buildings for the permanent capital. The following year Congress supplemented the president’s powers and resources. This allowed Washington full freedom to pick the site, and inevitably he picked the Georgetown-Anacostia region of Maryland, with adjacent parts of Virginia. Philadelphians watched with dismay as Washington ran the Potomac project full-throttle toward its 1800 completion date.

However, Butler continued to gripe about the exclusive jurisdiction clause in the first article of the Constitution. Even after the federal city had been erected and Congress had moved to the new capital, he supported the states’ rights notion of retrocession—a plan whereby the federal government would surrender its jurisdiction over the District of Columbia. In 1803, he endorsed a proposal sponsored by Congressman John Bacon of Massachusetts: “Neither the foreign ministers nor the resident citizens in the federal city have any thing to alarm them under state laws. There is no finger of blood in the laws of Maryland or Virginia. I am of Mr. Bacon’s opinion—return the sovereignty to the states.”\(^\text{17}\)

Nearly a quarter century after Butler’s death, his wish would be partially granted when an 1846 retrocession act returned part of the federal district to Virginia.\(^\text{18}\)

One final aspect of the nation’s capital involved Butler’s input. Contemporary sources indicate that he was among the South Carolina patrons of the Irish architect James Hoban, and that he was among those who introduced Hoban to George Washington during the president’s 1791 visit to Charleston. We would suspect this in any event,
as Butler was an active member of Charleston's Hibernian Society and very clannish in promoting the interests of his fellow Irishmen. Moreover, as a Kilkenny man, Hoban came from an Irish county that had strong historical connections to the Butler family.19

Thanks to the recommendations of Butler and other Charlestonians, Hoban entered his drawings in the 1792 competition to design the executive mansion, and was selected as the architect of the White House. Thus it was partly Butler’s doing that the leadership of the western world today operates out of an Irish Georgian country house at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Terry W. Lipscomb has been associated with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and the South Caroliniana Library for more than 35 years. He was also a longtime editor of the colonial journals of the South Carolina General Assembly. His other publications include South Carolina in 1791: George Washington's Southern Tour and South Carolina Revolutionary War Battles: The Carolina Lowcountry, April 1775–June 1776 and the Battle of Fort Moultrie.

Publication of The Letters of Pierce Butler, 1790–1794: Nation Building and Enterprise in the New American Republic provided researchers and general readers alike easy access to one of the South Caroliniana Library’s most significant manuscript items. Butler was a South Carolina signer of the U.S. Constitution and a U.S. senator from the state during the first three congresses of the new nation. He corresponded with many notable persons of his day, including George Washington, John Adams, George Mason, Richard Henry Lee, Wade Hampton, Andrew Pickens, and Charles Pinckney.

1 Journal of Southern History 59 (November 1993): 748–49.
9 Butler to Mrs. Massey Dawson, 19, March, 1797, Pierce Butler Letterbooks, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (microfilm at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina); Butler contended that his South Carolina citizenship followed him across state lines like a personal suit of clothes. Despite his length of residence in any northern metropolis, he believed that his status as a “sojourner” gave him certain legal immunities. In 1806, Butler contested Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws in a federal case that has long fascinated historians of slavery, but he later became involved in an even more curious citizenship case that involved Pennsylvania’s tax laws. Lydia Maria Francis Child, Isaac T. Hopper: A True Life (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 96–101; Butler v. Hopper, 4 Federal Cases 904–5 (1806); Butler v. Farnsworth, 4 Federal Cases 902–4 (1801).
10 Butler to Alexander Gillon, 25, May, 1790, in Lipscomb, Letters of Pierce Butler, 86.
15 Eaton, “An Old Street of New York,” 546–47; Butler to Lodewijck Hovy & Son, 22, Jan., 1791, in Lipscomb, Letters of Pierce Butler, 85; Butler’s former residence in Dock Street, featuring “accommodations for a large family,” was soon advertised for lease. [Francis Childs’s] New York Daily Advertiser, 21, Jan., 1791.
16 Bowling, Creation of Washington, D.C., 177, 181.
17 Butler to Aaron Burr, 20, March, 1783, in Kline and Ryan, Political Correspondence of Aaron Burr, 2:766–67.
Our documents were picked up as promised, receipted at that point, and generally described by the library staff. We have been provided with paperwork for tax purposes and otherwise treated like really special donors. There is undoubtedly considerable work to be done in analyzing the material, but happily others are doing that! I no longer have the total responsibility for the care and preservation of these primary documents, but nevertheless have the full use of them, along with the amazing support of the Caroliniana staff.

For those of you still undecided about dealing with your collections, I would encourage you to consider the advantages of placing them with the South Caroliniana Library. They are located on the Horseshoe at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, and the telephone number is 803-777-3131.

—Harriet Sinkler Little is a member of the Charleston Chapter of the South Carolina Genealogical Society. This piece was first published in winter 2009 issue of The Carolina Herald and is reprinted by permission of the editor.

Along with other members of her family, Harriet Sinkler Little gave the South Caroliniana Library “The Sinkler Family Papers, 1705, 1739, 1950–1953, 1984.” In large part, the collection revolves around the life and activities of William Sinkler (1787–1853). Sinkler maintained a 35-year correspondence with James B. Richardson (1770–1838), who served South Carolina in the state legislature and as governor (1802–1804).