

The growing Digital Civil War Archive at the University of Mississippi

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Abstract

In 2011, the University of Mississippi's Archives and Special Collections began an ongoing project to digitize a portion of materials related to the Civil War. This started as a means of participating in the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries' (ASERL's) collaborative digitization project, *Civil War in the American South*, which was established to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War. ASERL's project provides a single access point for Civil War materials from multiple repositories, and currently includes over 10,000 items from 30 libraries. In addition to providing greater access to the University's materials via the ASERL's portal, the creation of the University of Mississippi's *Digital Civil War Archive* provides a space to present various materials from multiple collections that are all related to the subject of the American Civil War. This provides an opportunity for greater discoverability and scholarship both near to and far from the library. In conjunction with the Civil War subject guide, which links to the *Digital Civil War Archive*, the library provides rich, cross-referencing tools for those interested in Mississippi and the Civil War. In addition to providing a brief history of UM's Civil War Digital Collection, this paper will document the process of identification, selection, and project management of materials to be added in 2014 to the Digital Civil War Archive, completed by Jennifer Ford (Head, Archives and Special Collection at University of Mississippi) and Susan Ivey (Digital Initiatives Librarian, University of Mississippi and author of this paper) in December 2013.

Introduction

The University of Mississippi began a project in 2011 to digitize a portion of its holdings related to Mississippi and the Civil War. This started as a means of participating in the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries' (ASERL's) ongoing collaborative digitization project, *Civil War in the American South*, which was established to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the start of the American Civil War. Participating ASERL members were asked to select materials of interest from their various collections and to digitize and create metadata based on ASERL's specifications. The files are stored on the individual institutions' servers, and the collective digital content is harvested and served through a single public portal managed by a partnership between ASERL and the University of Georgia Libraries. To date, the project includes over 10,000 items from 30 libraries.

Digital Civil War Archive (University of Mississippi)

In 2011, the University of Mississippi's Archives and Special Collections faculty and staff members identified over 700 items from 23 collections to digitize for inclusion in ASERL's collaborative project. These materials document troop movements, activities on the home front, battles, and social conditions. Additionally, a small portion of the materials shed insight into Antebellum and Reconstruction Mississippi. Types of materials digitized include correspondence, military records, requisitions, diary entries, currency, ration returns, military orders and records, postcards, and telegrams.

The materials chosen in 2011 for inclusion in the ASERL project were far from exhaustive of the University of Mississippi's Archives and Special Collections' holdings relating to Mississippi and the Civil War. With the objective of continuing digitization after the University's participation in the ASERL project in 2011, the *Digital Civil War Archive (University of Mississippi) (DCWAUM)* was created. This digital collection offers an individual space, unique from that of the ASERL project, for the University of Mississippi to highlight archival materials relating to the state and the Civil War from multiple collections. The *DCWAUM* is accessible through the University of Mississippi's Archives and Special Collections Digital Collections webpage, located on the University Libraries' website. While providing a single place for a growing number of digitized University of Mississippi Civil War materials, the *DCWAUM* also creates an additional access point, which provides an opportunity for greater discoverability and scholarship both near to and far from the library.

The *DCWAUM* in 2014

Since its creation in 2011, 100 digital items from 3 collections, including the Richard C. Bridges Collection, the Confederate Currency Collection, the Camp Dick Garnett

Letterbook, have been added to the *DCWAUM*. In December 2013, Head of Archives and Special Collections, Jennifer Ford, and I began identifying items for accretion into the *DCWAUM* in 2014. This was the first planned, large-scale addition to the *CDWAUM* since its inception.

We identified materials from 8 collections that would be valuable for the *DCWAUM* for several reasons. First, the materials we chose shed light on the same topics of social condition, troop movements, and life on the home front as the previous materials. Additionally, similar to the original items added to the *DCWAUM*, these collections contain a wide variety of materials types, including correspondence, government documents, diary writings, postage stamps, broadsides, ephemera, newspapers, lumber mill records, speeches, and portraits. These collections were also identified because of the rareness and uniqueness of one or several of their items, the high amount of requests for these collections, and their strong ties to the state, particularly northern Mississippi.

Of the 8 selected collections, only the Winfield Scott Featherston Collection is scheduled for comprehensive digitization for the *DCWAUM*. This collection, which is approximately 6.5 linear feet, contains correspondence, legal documents, newspapers, currency, reports, rosters, speeches, and pamphlets related to Confederate Brigadier General Featherston during his time in the Confederate army. After the war, he resided in Holly Springs, MS, practicing law and serving in the state legislature.

Other large collections were also identified for inclusion this year, but only portions of these collections were deemed relevant to Mississippi and the Civil War. Ford and I chose a variety of materials from the Brown-Learned Collection, including correspondence, business records, account books and journals, photographs, pamphlets, and reports. These materials to be added, which relate to Andrew Brown's and his decedents' lumber mill in Natchez, Mississippi, are dated immediately prior to, during, and after the War. Additionally, a portion of the James W. Silver Collection will be included. The selected materials from the Silver Collection describe Confederate camp life, the emotional state of soldiers and their families, the organization of the southern military, and personal views on the war. E.M. Davis's Civil War pardon, signed by President Andrew Johnson, selected from the Audubon Mississippi/Strawberry Plains Finley Collection, will be digitized as well.

We plan to re-process the Juanita Brown Collection in order to add the letters written by J. H. Buford to his sisters, dating from the beginning of the war until the winter of 1864. Buford was a member of the 4th Tennessee Infantry Regiment and the 32nd Mississippi Infantry Regiment. Letters chosen from the Joseph E. Davis Collection, written from former slave Benjamin Montgomery to his former owner Joseph Davis, will be included, as well.

Additionally, Ford and I have chosen to include the first two boxes from the Edmondson/Bray/Williams/Stidham Collection. These correspondences document Isabella “Belle” Buchanan Edmondson’s spy work in northern Mississippi for the Confederacy during the War, for which a warrant was issued in 1864 for smuggling and spying activities.

A variety of materials from our Small Manuscripts Collection have been selected. Various documents relating to Jefferson Davis will be digitized and added, most notably the 1865 broadside entitled, “Jeff Pettycoats,” and George Arnold’s 1865 text *Life and Adventures of Jeff. Davis*. Also chosen from the Small Manuscripts Collection is the Elizabeth Christie Brown Diary. Elizabeth Christie Brown was the daughter of a Mississippi lumber mill owner. The diary was written in Natchez during 1863, and is unique because it documents a female’s reaction to the War. The William Sylvester Dillon Diary, which details Dillon’s participation in the 4th Tennessee Infantry, and the Civil War Commemorative Stamp Collection, including stamps that celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Civil War, were chosen from the Small Manuscripts Collection for digitization, as well.

Conclusion

The creation of the *DCWAUM* provided a way for the University of Mississippi’s Archives and Special Collections faculty and staff to highlight materials across multiple collections that relate to Mississippi and the Civil War. Digital collections that group thematically similar materials allow the opportunity for new links between numerous physical collections to be made without the act of physically removing materials from their original collections, and the *DCWAUM* is no exception. The *DCWAUM* webpage provides three different avenues for information about the University’s Civil War holdings— links to the digital objects within the University’s Content Management System, links to a University-created Civil War subject guide, and a list of the original collections from which the materials originate, which gives information about the individual collections and the materials digitized from each. By including multiple information sources for searching and further research, the library provides rich, cross-referencing tools for those interested in Mississippi and the Civil War.

We realize that the proposed volume of the 2014 addition to the *DCWAUM* is ambitious. We also realize that the amount of growth for the *DCWAUM* will fluctuate annually, depending upon staffing; however, it is our plan that the prioritization of the *DCWAUM* will continue to increase. The University of Mississippi’s Archives and Special Collections’ Civil War materials provide unique perspectives and experiences, and the digitization of the materials will ensure greater preservation and access for current and future users.