

## **ORIGINS OF THE SOUTHERN ARCHIVISTS' CONFERENCE**

The Southern Archivists' Conference (SAC) was an outgrowth of joint meetings of the Society of Mississippi Archivists (SMA) and the Society of Alabama Archivists (SALA) which were held at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in the spring of 1985, and at the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Park Campus in Long Beach, Mississippi, in April, 1986. At the 1986 meeting, there was discussion of forming a regional archival organization. There was little, if any opposition to forming such an entity, but there was debate about its scope and nature.<sup>1</sup>

Since the SALA/SMA joint meetings worked well, it was decided that these organizations would meet again in 1987. Prior to that, SALA and the Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA) had met jointly a time or two. Archivists from Georgia and Tennessee were invited to join SALA and SMA for a meeting at the 4-H Camp at Lay Lake in Columbiana, Alabama, in 1987. "The theme of regional cooperation dominated the (spring of 1987) meeting. While everyone saw some advantages, there was disagreement about the nature, scope, and even the value of a regional organization. Out of the discussion came a more clearly focused image of what Mississippi and Alabama were willing to try."<sup>2</sup> Alabama and Mississippi agreed to join together and form the conference.

President Sally Ripatti, Tennessee Archivists, stated that she would take the SAC proposal to the state organization and invited Mike Thomason, SALA member, to present the idea for formation of SAC at the joint Tennessee/Kentucky fall meeting. At the September, 1987, fall meeting, Tennessee decided to join. Mike Thomason and Linda Overman, SMA member, presented the idea for a regional organization at a joint SGA/SALA meeting in the fall of 1987. By a narrow margin, the membership of SGA declined to join SAC at that time. The Louisiana Archives and Manuscripts Association (LAMA) later voted to join the Conference.

The following proposal to form a regional archival organization was printed in each state's newsletter in the summer of 1987:

### **PROPOSAL TO FORM A REGIONAL ARCHIVAL ORGANIZATION**

1. The organization will be known as the Southern Archivists' Conference (SAC).
2. All members of participating state archivists' organizations will be members of SAC.
3. The purpose of SAC is to foster closer cooperation among archivists in the region and advance the interests of our profession.

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<sup>1</sup> ACCESS, Summer 1986, Vol. 9, No. 3.

<sup>2</sup> ACCESS, Summer 1987, Vol. 10, No. 4.

4. The Southern Archivists' Conference will meet every other year beginning in 1988 at a convenient location. The meeting site will rotate among the states represented by the member organizations. Plans for the meeting will be the responsibility of the host state.
5. SAC will be governed by a committee composed of the presidents and vice-presidents of the member organizations, with the president of the host state society chairing the coordinating committee for the year preceding the meeting in her/his state. The coordinating committee will meet as necessary, but no less than once a year.
6. The committee will assess any financial obligations of the SAC activities among the constituent societies, normally following the principle of equal shares.
7. The committee will decide upon the appropriate mechanism for making any changes in the purpose, organization, or membership requirements for SAC.
8. A state society may join SAC by a majority vote of its members attending the joint SMA/SALA/SGA meeting in Columbiana, Alabama, or subsequently by a majority vote of its members at a regular meeting. Applications from states entering by the latter means must receive the approval of the SAC coordinating committee.

The first official meeting of the Southern Archivists' Conference was held at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, May 17-19, 1988. Archivists from Alabama, Tennessee, and Mississippi were in attendance. Since that time, SAC meetings have been held, every other year, at Lake Guntersville, AL (1990), Nashville, TN (1992), Natchez, MS (1994), New Orleans, LA (1996), Selma, AL (1998), and Memphis, TN (2000). A business meeting only was held at the Society of American Archivists (SAA) annual meeting in Birmingham, Alabama in 2002. In April, 2004, SAC met at the William F. Winter Archives and History Building, and the Old State Capitol History Museum in Jackson, Mississippi.

A decision was made that SAC be an association of organizations rather than a membership organization. No one wanted competition with the state organizations. SAC was purposely loosely formed for that reason – no constitution, no by-laws, no officers, and no membership fees. The primary goal was to increase the potential for speakers and improve programs. With greater financial resources, it would be possible to offer more workshops, hold more training programs, and bring in more speakers for sessions.

The Southern Archivists' Conference was meant to achieve whatever goals we in the region felt were worthwhile. It was meant to help us pool our resources, increase communication between state organizations and their members, and strengthen the profession in the member states. Initially, meetings were held at inexpensive sites where meeting spaces were free, where attendees ate all meals together, and where there was an opportunity to really get to know one

another. (Over the past years, the meetings have been held in larger cities and they have become more expensive. In some cases, this has reduced the number of members from the same institution who have been able to attend.)

Responsibilities for the host site, program, finances, and publicity have been divided among the four states, with members from the host state planning the meeting site, hotel accommodations, meals, and tours. To date, each state has contributed \$500.00 up front to the state responsible for finances. Remaining funds, after all expenses have been paid, have been divided with an equal share going to each of the four states.

-- Linda Overman, Member SALA and SMA, April 2004