Life in a Relocation Camp

The Butler Center recently processed the Edna Augusta Miller Collection. Miller was senior clerk-stenographer for Ray D. Johnston, project director for the Rohwer Relocation Center for Japanese Americans during World War II. The collection includes camp newspapers, yearbooks, photographs, and other miscellaneous materials. It also provides a fascinating window into life in a relocation camp.

On March 18, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9102, creating the War Relocation Authority, which was to supervise the relocation of all persons of Japanese descent on the West Coast. Within days, thousands of Japanese Americans had been removed from their homes to assembly centers in California.

From there they were shipped by train to relocation centers in other parts of the country. Southeast Arkansas had two such centers, one at Rohwer and one at Jerome.

Construction began on the Rohwer Relocation Center on March 18, 1942, and continued until it was completed in 1943. The center served as a temporary living space for Japanese Americans during the war. It was closed in 1946 and reopened in 1949 as a permanent living space for Japanese Americans who had been resettled in Arkansas.

Elementary School, Rohwer

1846 Mexican War Journal

On May 18, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico. Tensions between the two countries had been mounting for years over the location of the boundary between Texas and Mexico. These disagreements finally erupted into open warfare between the two nations in April 1846. Calls for volunteers soon went out across the country. Support for the war was particularly strong in the southern states.

In Alabama, Alexander Corbin Pickett, a lawyer by trade, joined the 1st Regiment of Alabama Volunteers. Pickett was born around 1823 in Virginia. He was the son of Steptoe and Sarah O. Pickett, who were some of the earliest settlers of northern Alabama. The elder Pickett was a schoolmate of James Buchanan and cousin to Chief Justice John Marshall, “Light Horse” Harry Lee, and General George Pickett of “Pickett’s Charge” fame.

The Butler Center recently secured the Mexican War journal of Alexander C. Pickett. The journal was discovered and graciously donated to the Center by Jo Blatti of Batesville. As an educated man, Pickett offers interesting commentary and insight into the often overlooked war. His entries begin on June 11, 1846, as recruits were rendezvousing in Mobile. On June 29, the regiment boarded a ship for Texas. Pickett writes, “The steamers start at 6 o’clock p.m., their departure cheered by the deafening applause of the citizens of Mobile.”

After briefly serving on the U.S.-Mexican border, the regiment was ordered to Camargo, Mexico. They were later transferred to Tampico. Pickett offers nearly daily entries on the unit’s activities. The journal concludes in January 1847 while Pickett was still in Mexico. The regiment returned to Alabama about six months later.

In the late 1850s, Pickett moved to Arkansas, settling in Jackson County. He continued to work as a...
Cont. from Life in a Relocation Camp
July 31, 1942. Evacuees began arriving on September 18, before the center was finished. The camp occupied 500 acres in Desha County, much of it swampland. The camp was divided into numbered blocks, with each residence block containing ten to fourteen tar-papered, A-frame barracks. Each building housed four to six families in “apartments.” The barracks had electricity, but no running water. In addition to the barracks, each block contained a mess hall, a laundry, and a bath house. The center also had a school, a hospital, an auditorium, a fire station, recreation facilities, administration buildings, and employee barracks.

The camp had a newspaper, the Rohwer Outpost, which was printed twice weekly when paper was available. The newspaper, which was printed in both English and Japanese, reported on happenings in the camp, as well as news from the outside that affected the residents. It also reported on Rohwer residents inducted into the military and on those killed in action.

War Relocation Authority records show a peak population of 8,475 at the Rohwer center. A total of 11,962 passed through the center at some point. There were 417 births and 168 deaths. The Rohwer Relocation Center closed on November 30, 1945.

Contributed by Carolyn Cash, Manuscripts Department

Cont. from 1846 Mexican War Journal
lawyer until war rumbled across the land once more. Following the firing on Fort Sumter, Pickett offered his services to the Confederate States of America. He organized and was elected captain of the “Jackson Guards.”

The company was soon mustered in as the 1st Arkansas Infantry, CSA. Pickett was not with the unit long. In December 1862, he was transferred and promoted to colonel of the 10th Missouri Infantry, CSA. After the war, Pickett returned to Arkansas and resumed his law practice. He died in Augusta in 1883.

The Butler Center is thrilled to have Pickett’s journal as part of its collection. Documents from the Mexican War are scarce, and pieces with an Arkansas connection are even scarcer. Plans are under way to transcribe, edit, and publish the journal as part of the Butler Center’s book publishing program. Stay tuned for future updates.

Contributed by Brian K. Robertson, Manuscripts Coordinator

University of Arkansas Press Agreement

The success of the Butler Center’s publishing program has brought a new partner to the table, the University of Arkansas Press. An agreement reached this past summer will allow the UA Press to market and distribute Butler Center–published books. The partnership will increase our publishing presence and enhance our overall outreach efforts. Butler Center books will be featured in the UA Press’s publication catalog and on its website.

The UA Press was founded in 1980 as the book-publishing division of the University of Arkansas. A member of the Association of American University Presses, it publishes approximately twenty titles a year, about a third of which fall under the general heading of Arkansas and Regional Studies.

The UA Press is charged by the trustees of the university with the publication of books in service to the academic community and for the enrichment of the broader culture by sharing the fruits of research and creative activity. To order books from UA Press, call toll-free 1-800-626-0090 or visit online at www.uapress.com.
A Word from the Center
David Stricklin, Head of the Butler Center

People in the history business get plenty of opportunities to address historically minded groups. I had a particularly delightful experience giving a talk a few weeks ago to a meeting of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Arkansas. Before I gave my talk, I heard several members of this distinguished group, who trace their ancestry to the period of English colonization of North America preceding the American Revolution, discussing the plans for an upcoming ceremony. Enthusiastic comments were made concerning refreshments and photographs, and I assumed they were planning an event for their own members. I was wrong. It turns out that the plans revolved around a tradition of the Dames, one going back to the 1950s.

For a half century, members of the Colonial Dames have attended naturalization ceremonies at the federal courthouse in Little Rock and given receptions for their newest fellow citizens. They provide food and take souvenir photographs to give the happy families. Some members of the group told me how proud it made them to hear the new citizens discuss the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Now, I don’t know. Maybe groups all over the country do the same thing. Maybe Colonial Dames in other places do this. But it made me feel really good to know that somebody is extending such a gracious expression of welcome to folks who are just getting started in their journey as citizens of the United States, especially a group of people whose genealogy goes back so far into the nation’s past. Well done, Colonial Dames!

SARA Correction

In our last newsletter, we described Lucille Westbrook as the founder of the Southwest Arkansas Regional Archives. Several people sent documents to assist us in correcting our error. Ms. Westbrook was a longtime volunteer with SARA and the interim director for 10 years—quite a long interim! But the credit for founding the archives should go to many people with strong interests in the history of Southwest Arkansas, including Mary Medearis, James H. Pilkington, Sr., and John Ferguson, the former director of the Arkansas History Commission, which assumed control of SARA in 2005. We regret the error and congratulate SARA, its many volunteers and supporters, and the History Commission on long years of service to Arkansas researchers.

Professor of the Year Announced as Fellow

The Butler Center is pleased to announce Dr. Jay Barth, associate professor of politics at Hendrix College, as the 2008 Butler Center fellow. A native of central Arkansas, Barth received his undergraduate degree from Hendrix College and his master’s and doctoral degrees in political science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Since 1994, Barth has been a faculty member in the Department of Politics at Hendrix College.

In November, Barth was selected as Arkansas’ Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, an award honoring the most outstanding undergraduate instructors in the country.

Barth has published works on American governors, the politics of the South, and race and gender politics in such journals as Political Psychology, Polity, Women and Politics, State Politics and Policy Quarterly, and Politics and Policy. Barth’s most recent publication was the second edition of Arkansas Politics and Government: Do the People Rule? which he coauthored with the late Diane D. Blair. The book, published by the University of Nebraska Press, was released in April 2005.

Barth is a noted expert in Southern politics and has an educational career beyond the classroom that combines a wide-ranging research agenda, an ongoing role as a public analyst on the politics of Arkansas and the South, and an active involvement in several advocacy groups.

As the Butler Center research fellow, Barth will conduct extensive research on Arkansas politics and public policy and assist the Butler Center in building its research collections.
Senior Editor’s Column

Nathania Sawyer

Hope (Watermelon) Springs Eternal

Back in the spring of 2006, I wrote in a newsletter column that our staff historian, Mike Polston, and assistant editor, Guy Lancaster, were trying to grow a watermelon in the windowsill of the EOA offices. After they edited the entry on the Hope Watermelon Festival, they became fascinated with the idea of growing a giant melon in our office. Many seedlings began the journey, but only “Scratchy” flourished that year. Scratchy became the unofficial EOA mascot, and much discussion ensued about grow lights, importing bees into the office for pollination, and best practices in watermelon rearing.

After the Encyclopedia website went live in May 2006, we held one of our launch parties in Hope. The organizers were amused by the staff’s attempt to grow a melon and gave us an autographed poster from the Hope Watermelon Festival. The guys placed the poster near Scratchy for inspiration.

Although the vine grew, we had no luck growing a melon. This year, they tried again, and Scratchy II became a member of our office. Armed with knowledge from last year, Mike and Guy contended with bugs, pollination by tweezers, and absence of full sunlight. And, as an extra precaution, they parked our miniature Christ of the Ozarks statue in Scratchy II’s pot in hopes of divine intervention.

The photo in this column is of the surviving watermelon that was grown in our windowsill. Sure, it’s not a contender for a prize at the state fair (unless they open up a new category for office-grown melons), but we think of it as a testament to curiosity, determination, and Miracle-Gro plant spikes.

I see Scratchy as a symbol of the Encyclopedia Project. We started from scratch, weren’t completely sure of how we were going to pull off this undertaking, and learned a lot from our early mistakes. We’re also growing bigger and better each year. The Encyclopedia now has more than 1,400 entries and almost 3,000 pieces of media. Every week we learn something new about our state, add entry ideas to our database, and come up with ideas for new features and functions to make the website better. I just can’t think of a better way to spend my year.

I hope 2008 will be a year of growth and wonder for each of you, too.

Media Links

One of the newest features on the Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture’s website is the ability to access entries from the Encyclopedia’s Media Gallery. The full-size versions of the media now include links to related entries. This new feature allows users browsing the media categories to see which entries contain the media they are viewing. Just click on the link to go to the entry.

Check it out at www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net
N}
early everyone knows that Arkansas was home to two
internment camps for Japanese Americans (see page 1),
as well as various POW camps housing German and
Italian soldiers, but the state was also home to one camp for
conscientious objectors (COs)—Camp Magnolia in Columbia
County. Established in 1941, it was part of the Civilian Public
Service (CPS) program for COs, established after heavy lob-
bying from the nation’s historic peace churches, and involved
the young men performing much the same duties as did the
Civilian Conservation Corps in earlier years. Aside from con-
structing dams and reservoirs and planting trees, the men at
Camp Magnolia also participated in warfare-related medical
experiments.

Of course, many people in that part of the state were none
too pleased at the presence of the “conchies,” as they were
called. Taking some leisure time in the town of McNeil,
three COs found themselves almost lynched by irate locals,
especially after hysteria spread that one of the men, who was
writing poetry about trains, was recording secret information
for the enemy. Black COs found a welcoming environment
inside the camp but only hostility and racism outside. When
the camp was destroyed by a tornado in 1945, the local news-
paper reported the event under the headline “God Strikes the
Conchies.” The men were transferred to other camps across
the nation, probably to the delight of many Arkansans.
The Butler Center and the Encyclopedia of Arkansas (EOA) welcome new staff members, Alex Baird, Ali Welky, and Steve Teske. Alex Baird joins the Butler Center staff as the genealogy assistant. Baird brings with her an extensive knowledge of genealogy research tools. “I find genealogical research to be fun and mind-stimulating. I hope to continue opening new research avenues for our patrons,” says Baird.

As copyeditor for the EOA, Ali Welky edits the final versions of all EOA entries before they are approved by authors and posted on the EOA website. Welky also edits all content for the EOA website, the Butler Banner, the annual EOA calendar (now on sale!), and other special publications. Welky notes that, “I get to read every word of every entry in the Encyclopedia, and I learn something fascinating about Arkansas every day.”

Also joining the EOA team is Steve Teske. Teske is the new fact checker for the EOA, which means that after an entry is submitted, and the editors identify which items they would like verified, Teske goes to work verifying facts such as dates, locations, events, and comparisons. As Teske points out, “Fact-checking for the Encyclopedia is fascinating, not only because of the opportunity to learn new facts about Arkansas every day, but also because of the joy of working with a talented crew of editors.”

New Arrivals

The Butler Center Events in the Spotlight

First Lady Ginger Beebe signs Arkansas Artists calendars at the Cox Creative Gallery during 2nd Friday Art Night

Dr. John A. Kirk, University of London, signs the first copy of his book, Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis at Legacies & Lunch

David Stricklin, Richard Butler, and Charles Rodgers cut birthday cake at the Butler Center’s 10th anniversary celebration

David Stricklin, Ellis Melton, and Legacies & Lunch panelists Bobby Roberts, Presley Melton, Jo Melton, and Tim Heiple
DONATIONS
Brent & Sam’s Cookies, North Little Rock
George B. Clark, Conway
Robert G. Cowie, Paris
Mr. & Mrs. John P. Gill, Little Rock
Gordon & Patty Hale, Berryville
Arthur J. Pfeifer, Little Rock
Lou Ellen Treadway, Little Rock
James R. & Patricia Wallace, North Little Rock

In Memory of Gertrude Remmel Butler:
Clinton School of Public Service, Little Rock
Country Homes Garden Club, Little Rock
Lee B. Davis, Little Rock
Marguerite Gamble, Little Rock
Mr. & Mrs. Tom E. Hays Jr., Little Rock
Brownie Ledbetter, Little Rock
Jeanne M. McDaniel, Little Rock
Ann Nicholson, Little Rock
Mr. & Mrs. William C. Norman Jr., Little Rock
Barbara L. Phillips, Little Rock
Bob Razer, Little Rock
Mr. & Mrs. David Rickard, Little Rock
Bobby Roberts, Little Rock
David Stricklin & Sally Browder, Little Rock
Mr. & Mrs. Robert M. Wilson, Little Rock

Mary F. Worthen, Little Rock

In Memory of William “Bud” Grisham:
Linda Bly, Little Rock

In Memory of Naomi Hull:
Linda Bly, Little Rock
Bobby L. Roberts, Little Rock
Brian K. Robertson, Conway
David Stricklin & Sally Browder, Little Rock
Ken & Sarah Ziegenbein, Little Rock

In Memory of Marie Ward Jones:
Justlyn Matlock, Little Rock
Paula K. Roberson, Little Rock

Peyton & Betty Brewer Rice Art Conservation Fund:
Grimsley & Carol Graham, Rogers
Jeffrey, Reta & Finlay Graham, Jonesboro

In Memory of H. Price Roark:
Marguerite Gamble, Little Rock

GIFTS OF MATERIALS
AETN, Conway
Arkansas Railroad Club, North Little Rock
Melrita Bonner, Little Rock
Ralph Brodie, Little Rock
Richard Butler, Little Rock
Martha M. Cease, Mountainside, NJ
Robert B. Clark, Little Rock
Jill Curran, Little Rock
Lenore Dale, Solana Beach, CA
Tom W. Dillard, Fayetteville

Anne Bryant Dixon, Little Rock
Gordon L. Duckworth, Little Rock
Judy Gaddy, Little Rock
John P. Gill, Little Rock
John Griffin, Searcy
Gene Hatfield, Conway
Mary Frances Hodges, Little Rock
Jajuuan Johnson, Little Rock
Lee & Paula Johnson, Little Rock
Collins Kilgore, Little Rock
Stephen Koch, Little Rock
Willard M. Lewis, Little Rock
Michael Margolis, Little Rock
Jeanne M. McDaniel, Little Rock
Jim McDaniel, Dallas, TX
Beverly Mikita, Sanders Branch, CALS
Reita Walker Miller, Little Rock
Mitchell Williams Law Firm, Little Rock
National Park Service - Buffalo National River, Harrison
Emily Paul, Little Rock
Mike Polston, Cabot
John G. Ragsdale, Little Rock
Skip Rutherford, Little Rock
Phyllis Shackelford, Little Rock
Rhonda Stewart, Little Rock
R. Allison Streepey, Little Rock
David Stricklin & Sally Browder, Little Rock
Parker Westbrook, Nashville
Blake Wintory, Nashville

The New 2008 Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture Calendars are Here!

Calendars are only $10 each plus an additional $2 for shipping and handling. Please clip the order form below and send payment to: Encyclopedia of Arkansas - Central Arkansas Library System 100 Rock St., Little Rock, AR 72201

Calendar Order Form:
I would like to order __________ calendars x $10 each = $___________ + $2 shipping and handling. Enclosed is my payment of $ ____________
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__________________________________________________________________________
City __________________________________________ State _______ Zip ____________
Recent Addition to Photograph Collection

Black Diamond, the celebrated trotting ostrich, Hot Springs