

# the Collection

DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & MUSEUM

Fall 2009 Volume IX, Issue II

## Opening: Backyards and Beyond: Mississippians and Their Stories

5 November 2009 - 31 January 2010

*Celebrating the amazing adaptability and strength of spirit of Mississippians*

Hurricane Katrina has left lasting affects on the people and landscape of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. After the natural disaster that was Katrina, artist H.C. Porter and Karole Sessums, Backyards and Beyond Executive Director, came together for a joint cause, to document and preserve the stories of those

Mississippians affected by the hurricane in an artistic and powerful way. For the year following Katrina's landfall, the pair traveled Mississippi's coast and inland counties to photograph and record the hope, loss, and resiliency of Mississippians. The resulting exhibit is profound. Composed of "environmental portraits," the exhibit itself is a combination of paintings based on Porter's photographs and audio recordings collected by Sessums of stories told by the people Porter captured on film. Backyards and Beyond: Mississippians and Their Stories is a nationally touring , mixed media exhibition which showcases 81 different paintings, each with their own compelling story which promises to be "a total immersion experience that will be truly unforgettable."



Porter beautifully weaves the faces and voices of diversity with commonalities of loss and hope. H.C. Porter in her studio.

*"My hopes is that this exhibition will move people toward continued volunteerism and humanitarianism in Mississippi or wherever it may be needed, in our own backyards or beyond. This is a story that must be told for a very long time."*

*H.C. Porter  
Artist*

### Special Programs

#### **Behind the Scenes with H.C. Porter and Karole Sessums and Book Signing**

15 November @ 2:30 pm

The artists will share personal details and insights about selected paintings, behind the scene of creating the exhibition and being in the field compiling the documentary work. Porter and Sessums will be available to sign copies of their newly published book which are available for purchase from the University Book store or in the Archives the day of the tour.

#### **Lunch & Learn Lectures:**

#### **Preservation of our Cultural Heritage along the MS Gulf Coast Presented by Jamie Ellis**

10 November @ Noon  
Capps Archives & Museum Building,  
Howorth Seminar Room

#### **Views from the Grassroots: Disaster and Community Building on the MS Gulf Coast Presented by Dr. John Green**

18 November @ Noon  
Capps Archives & Museum Building,  
Howorth Seminar Room

### WHAT'S INSIDE

Opening: Backyards & Beyond: Mississippians & Their Stories  
PAGE 1

Backyards & Beyond: Behind the Scenes Tour and book signing with HC Porter & Karole Sessums Lunch & Learn Lectures  
PAGE 1

Presentation: LePoint Smith to be honored with Lucy Howorth Award  
PAGE 2

Photograph Donated  
PAGE 2

On Display: Inspiring the Next Generation: Exceptional Mississippi Women exhibit  
PAGE 2

Spotlight: Walter Sillers, Jr.  
PAGE 3

Celebrate: American Archives Month & Program  
PAGE 4

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Emily Erwin, University Archivist

*All University Archives & Museum exhibits and programs are free and open to the public.*

## Presentation: LePoint Smith to be Honored with Award

**11 October 2009 2:30 pm**  
**Lucy Somerville Howorth Seminar room**

On Sunday, Oct. 11, the Archives & Museum will present posthumously the Lucy Somerville Howorth Outstanding Woman of the Delta Award to a true Mississippi Delta icon, LePoint Cassibry Smith. The event is slated to begin at 2:30 p.m. in the Lucy Somerville Howorth Seminar Room in the Charles W. Capps, Jr. Archives & Museum building. The event is free and open to the public.

LePoint Cassibry Smith was a woman of great influence and experience, who served the people of the Delta as an educator, librarian, mentor and friend.

Mrs. Smith's life serves as a testament to her desire to improve the position of women in the Mississippi Delta. At a time when few women held positions of influence, Mrs. Smith stood tall, directing the Bolivar County Library system, while serving her community through countless civic organizations. It is our pleasure to honor her memory with the Howorth Award.

As part of the ceremony, a portrait of LePoint Cassibry Smith will be hung in her honor in the Capps Archives & Museum Seminar Room named for Judge Lucy Howorth. As the mother of three daughters and the surrogate daughter of Judge Howorth, Mrs. Smith always had equity for girls and women at the top of her agenda. Judge Howorth and Mrs. Smith's friendship and common goals make this award most significant.

The Lucy Somerville Howorth Award is presented to a woman of the Mississippi Delta who has made significant contributions on society on the local, state, regional and national levels. Past recipients include: Franke Keating (2007), Mae Bertha Carter (2005), Keith Dockery McLean (2003) and Emma K. Lytle (2000).



## Three Women, Three Lifetimes Portrait Donated

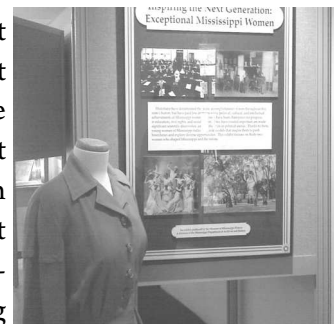
Carolyn Manning presents Delta State's Archives and Museum a rare photo of three MS arts legends – Eudora Welty, Margaret Walker Alexander and Thalia Mara. Accepting the portrait are Dorothy Shawhan, Chair Emeritus of the Division of Languages and Literature, University Archivist Emily Erwin, and Dr. Myrtis Tabb, Vice President of Finance & Administration.

## On Display & Lunch and Learn Lecture:

### Inspiring the Next Generation: Exceptional Mississippi Women

Exhibit on display through 25 September 2009

For centuries, historians have recorded the numerous accomplishments of men, but "Inspiring the Next Generation" reveals the great things Mississippi women have done throughout history. From a former slave turned international performer to a five-time Olympian, women have become influential in political, cultural, and intellectual fields. Women have also made great strides in education, civil rights, and social reform. The exhibit will showcase thirty-two women in eight different categories, who had a great impact on Mississippi and the nation. It will highlight women that were involved in civil rights, education reform, woman suffrage, government, performance, art, literature, athletics. These thirty-two women serve as inspirations to motivate young women to push the limits and follow many different paths.



**Lunch & Learn Lecture, 17 September 2009 @ Noon**

**Dr. Cora Norman to present "Women as Agents of Change in MS During the 20th Century"**  
**Howorth Seminar Room**

# Who was Walter Sillers and Why has He been so Neglected?

By Benjamin O. Sperry

*“The most powerful man in Mississippi.”* That is the frequently repeated line you hear about longtime House Speaker Walter Sillers of Rosedale (1888-1966). People who remember him and worked with him will tell you that it is absolutely true. If that is the case, however, then why is it that most people not living within 50 miles of this campus probably have never heard of him? He supposedly “ran” Mississippi from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, a period of convulsive change and upheaval when Mississippi was such a focal point for the drama of America’s racial dilemma. Yet the historical record on Sillers is almost bare. Where are the books? Where are the journal articles? Where is the great notoriety that has accrued to so many of the other segregationist leaders of the early post-war years? If he was indeed so powerful and important, why hasn’t that been more substantiated by historians?

A couple of masters’ theses do tell the outline of his life and review some of Sillers’ early political struggles, but those papers date back to the 1970s and 1980s. He also gets a mention or two in James C. Cobb’s book on the Delta, Kari A. Frederickson’s study of the Dixiecrats, in Congressman Frank Smith’s memoirs, and in a few other published works, but mostly to get knocked around for his supposed corruption, racism and coziness with big business. His words most remembered, that Hodding Carter is “unfit to live in a decent white society,” ring crotchety and embarrassing in a modern context. The contemporaneous Jackson-based news coverage offered reams of articles, of course, but the drumbeat of the same handful of descriptors – “powerful,” “old guard,” “iron-fisted,” “shrewd,” “wily” – seems after awhile to reduce Sillers to facelessness, to hidebound caricature and even cliché.

I have some theories as to why the record appears surprisingly incomplete. Amid the huge social changes that have taken place since Sillers’ time, there has been a natural desire among Mississippians to want to move on from the old fear and pain of their racial history, and to try to leave the white mindset of so much of the Sillers generation well buried in the past. There are other, institutional, reasons why Sillers especially is largely overlooked. For all of the power vested in the Mississippi legislature vis-à-vis the gov-

ernor from the 1890 state convention until quite recently, it was the executive who garnered the attention. This is particularly the case with the advent of television and in the dramatic posturing showdown of state vs. federal power that took place in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Ironically, the governor had practically all the limelight but in fact not much of the real day-to-day influence. That, simply put, resided instead with Sillers and with a handful of other legislative leaders who reported to him. But the scholarship has yet to correct that balance and give Sillers his historical due.



Walter Sillers, Jr.

Photo courtesy of [www.sillersfamily.com](http://www.sillersfamily.com)

My own recognition of this curious void and what it says about Mississippi, and also my particular interest in Sillers, have come about gradually. For the last few years I have been researching and writing a Ph.D. dissertation at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland (Ohio!) on Mississippi’s elite white political “moderates” of the early post-war years. And in chapter after chapter – on the Dixiecrats of 1948-1952, on the state’s reaction to the *Brown* ruling, on the struggle for leadership in the legislature in 1955, etc. – there loomed in my sources this “powerful” and invariably unexplored, historically vague figure of Walter Sillers. So the more I got into the political history of the state in that period, the more I started wondering about exactly who he was. I wanted to know more about the worldview of the Mississippi segregationist leadership he personified that so bitterly resented the “moderates” and so resisted change. I wanted to understand the context in which Sillers operated. That curiosity has essentially led me here to Delta State University, to do research in Sillers’ papers at the Archives, to write about him, and hopefully to fill a gap in what we know about Mississippi history.

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### *About the Author:*

Benjamin Sperry is a visiting professor of history at Delta State for the 2009-2010 academic year. In addition to his work in the Archives on Walter Sillers, Jr. he is teaching modern U.S. history in the fall and spring semesters. Also, he and Michelle Johansen of the history department are developing a history course on civil rights in the Delta, which will be taught in the spring.

# October is American Archives Month!

Please join us for a Lunch & Learn Lecture to celebrate  
American Archives Month!

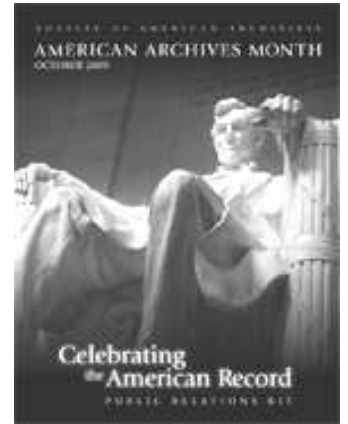
Professor Benjamin O. Sperry presents

## ***Buttered Food and Football: A Mississippi Archives Odyssey***

Charles W. Capps, Jr. Archives & Museum Building

Lucy Somerville Howorth Seminar Room

22 October @ Noon



Beverages and desserts will be provided.

### Time in a Bottle

Anniversaries are special occasions and for the faculty, staff and student body of Delta State University, this is no different. In 1975, to commemorate the University's 50th Anniversary, memorabilia was collected which represented the University campus and community of 1975. The time capsule is buried at the base of the Flag Plaza on the Quadrangle and will be opened on Delta State's centennial birthday, 2025. A second time capsule was buried in the base of one of the light fixture pillars on the southwest corner of the Wyatt Administration building in 2004. Each of these time capsules were created to share a moment in time with a future Delta State generation.

**Delta State University Archives & Museum**  
**Charles W. Capps, Jr. Archives & Museum Building**  
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