
CENTERPIECE

Newsletter of the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Southeastern Louisiana University

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From the Director

Louisianians remain historical veterans of extreme conditions and the residents of southeast Louisiana and southwest Mississippi are no exception. Hurricanes, revolts, military invasions, and chronic political instability have long characterized the region. Despite such a record, regional residents were nonetheless as shocked as the rest of the nation by the dramatic transformation to our lives occasioned by the COVID pandemic.

None of us had encountered anything remotely similar to the reconditioning of life, as we know it, that accompanied the coronavirus. But our forefathers in south Louisiana had - *many times!* Whether in the form of the 1918-19 influenza pandemic, regular cholera outbreaks, the devastating implications of the Texas Fever Tick invasion, or worst of all, the panic and chaos surrounding the near annual Yellow Fever outbreaks in the nineteenth century, regional residents are generational veterans of such adversity.

And, true to our mission, the staff of the Center met the crisis head on. As the university transitioned to all virtual classes, the Center briefly closed its doors to physical research to properly clean and establish guidelines for safe operations during the pandemic. But the need for information never ceases. Center staffers all worked from home for a few weeks until the university Safety Office inspected our COVID fighting policy adjustments and our spacing arrangements. By June we were back in business to physical researchers, albeit under COVID necessary precautions that remain in place as of this writing.

It seems many people used their quarantine time to organize their family collections, or literally clean out grandmother's attic, and we have been challenged by the arrival of a steady flow of new material to the Center that will be available to researchers as quickly as we are able to process it. Requests from national and international researchers have never been higher and the staff continue to scramble to accommodate all requests. National and regional media outlets such as the *New York Times*, Central Kentucky Television, WBRZ Television, and *The Advocate*,

have all leaned on us for assistance with projects. The burden of revealing our incredibly peculiar pattern of development is one we bear with pleasure - the staff have worked tirelessly to accommodate all "need it now" requests.

Despite the pandemic all other Center projects remain ongoing within our stringent COVID combatting modifications. The annual Gulf South History and Humanities Conference, our new project highlighting regional political figures, our rewarding partnership with the Young Sanders Center, and plans for our new project detailing the career of Southeastern alum and jazz great, Bill Evans, all continue to move forward. We are open for business, come see us, but bring your mask!

Whether for better or worse, residents of south Louisiana are rarely intimidated. Long-time residents understand that life in this remarkably unique region frequently comes with risk. We will get through this new challenge, just as we have all others in the past, and we will be made stronger from the effort. And, as always, the Center will be here to document the good along with the bad, ever ensuring that future generations have the necessary information to understand how and why it happened, and what we did to overcome the challenge. We encourage you to join us in the effort!

- **Samuel C. Hyde, Jr. Ph.D., Director**



Pictured (left to right): Center Director Sam Hyde, Graduate Assistant Colin Mathison, Student Worker Sarah Curtis, Graduate Assistant Amelia Haag, Assistant Director Keith Finley, and Graduate Assistant Abigail Simmons.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Sometimes things do not go according to plan. The Center commenced operations in 2020 sanguine about the future. And why not? We were thrilled with our new collaboration with the Young Sanders Center and excited about selecting the first Sanders Scholar and Research Assistant. Little did we know when we returned from the Christmas holiday that 2020 would be an extraordinary year. Word of a virulent virus originating in China and spreading throughout the world began crossing our radar in February but garnered little attention due to its distance from the Florida Parishes. By the end of the month, however, a nationwide panic was setting in as the number of cases in the United States and here in Louisiana began to skyrocket.

By mid-March, Southeastern Louisiana University officials announced a school-wide shut down in order to help “flatten the curve.” Center staff members were caught by surprise at the abrupt announcement, but true to form, began taking immediate steps to implement a telecommuting plan so that basic Center functions, including answering emails, would be addressed while we quarantined at home. Equally as important was ensuring that our student staff would continue to get paid for services performed while in quarantine. Southeastern officially transitioned all classes to an online format commencing on 18 March. We were entering uncharted territory as individuals, as an institution, and as a nation. In the middle of the lockdown, Dr. Sam Hyde was interviewed by WBRZ TV’s John Pastorek concerning the coronavirus pandemic. The two discussed Louisiana’s history of dealing with epidemics with special emphasis on the cycle of yellow fever, influenza, and measles outbreaks that confronted the state in the past. Vintage photos housed in the Center were used to emphasize state efforts to control past epidemics. The segment appeared April 19 in a special edition of WBRZ Channel 2 in Baton Rouge’s Sunday Journal program.

Our quarantine stretched until late May at which time Center Director Hyde began communicating with the Southeastern Safety Office to determine protocols for reopening the Center and returning to some semblance of normalcy. Inspectors visited the Center with an eye toward determining max occupancy of the Center based on the state mandated 50% capacity threshold. As the summer term commenced, the Center reopened its doors with a flexible schedule that balanced the needs of the community

with the health and safety of our staff. New guidelines and procedures were introduced including the required use of masks for all visitors to the Center and the quarantining of materials used by patrons.



Pictured: Director Sam Hyde being interviewed by WBRZ’s John Pastorek

By the start of the fall semester we had resumed our normal operating hours with our entire staff working in person. And as expected, Center staff members continued their numerous pursuits. In August for example, assistant director Keith Finley had a chapter titled “‘Like a Jackass in a Hailstorm’: Lyndon Johnson, Vietnam, and the Upending of the American Century” included in the book *Profiles in Power: Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President*.

Likewise, Dr. Sam Hyde co-authored a book with his wife and fellow history professor, Dr. Sarah Hyde, which was accepted for publication, and he is also currently completing an article to be included in a new book for the University Press of Florida. Dr. Hyde was also interviewed for a story in a recent *New York Times* article highlighting Louisiana’s dubious distinction as the state which for thirty-one consecutive years had the highest homicide rate in the nation.

As of the writing of this newsletter, visitors to the Center are still expected to wear a mask and to agree to social distance while here. Tables, doors, chairs, and writing implements are cleaned with disinfectant after each patron leaves and our entire facility is wiped clean at the end of each business day. These safety protocols will remain in place until the pandemic subsides. Like all of our readers we anxiously await widespread dissemination of the coronavirus vaccine so that we may return to normal activity and recommence our regularly scheduled events. Until then, we urge patience and adherence to the Center’s new COVID-related protocols.



Pictured: Graduate Assistant Abigail Simmons practicing COVID safety protocols while archiving a new collection.

If you have any questions about existing safety protocols, please feel free to call us at 985-549-2151 or email at: selahistory@selu.edu.

“Pioneers in Politics” Exhibit

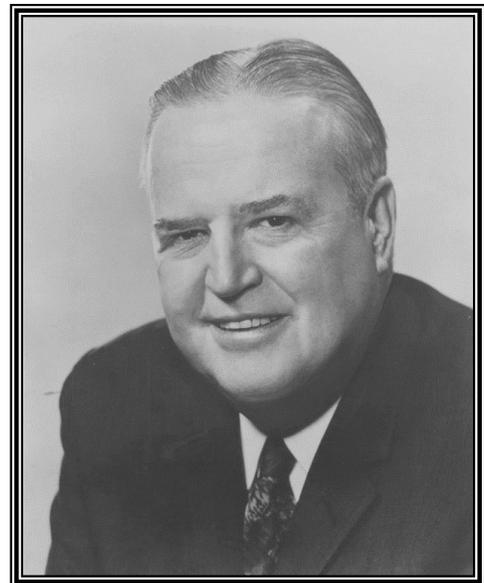
The Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies recently announced the opening of a new exhibit titled “Pioneers in Politics: Examining Influential Political Figures as Revealed in the Holdings of the Center.” Despite the extended 2020 shutdown due to COVID, our intrepid graduate assistants did much of the exhibit planning while quarantining at home and were able to complete the exhibit upon their return.

Center Director and Southeastern History Professor Sam Hyde said the exhibit is designed to educate the campus community and wider public about the vast holdings highlighting regional and statewide political history that are housed in the archives of the Center. The Center’s graduate research assistants, Amelia Haag, Abigail Simmons, and Bailey Hall Sones completed research and construction of the exhibit at the end of the 2020 fall semester.

“The exhibit spans the colonial period to the present day and includes details revealing the political careers of some well-known figures, as well as some the public has likely never heard of before,” Hyde said. “With the exception of a few editorial suggestions from Assistant Director Keith Finley and myself, the students put the project together completely on their own.”

The exhibit includes information on nationally recognized figures such as Huey Long and longtime congressman James H. “Jimmy” Morrison, as well as local leaders such as former Hammond Mayors Tom Anderson and Debbie Saik Pope. Special segments are devoted to the contributions of women, African Americans, and long-term families from the Florida Parishes. Especially gratifying has been the significant number of visitors to the exhibit who are highlighted in it.

“Preparing this exhibit, showcasing southern and Louisiana politicians, gave us a chance to closely explore the original artifacts and materials within the Center’s holdings,” said Research Assistant Simmons, who led the effort. “We did our best to reveal the positive aspects of each individual’s career.”



Pictured: Congressman James H. “Jimmy” Morrison

“Many people are drawn to stories of corruption and other negative aspects often associated with political figures,” added Sones. “We instead focused more on their constructive policies that helped shape Louisiana communities without turning a blind eye to the tawdry side of Louisiana politics.” The political history of the state is present in the exhibit: warts and all.

Research Assistant Haag summed up the project by saying, “It was a lot of work, but it allowed us to take a deep dive into the Center’s holdings. We found a lot of extraordinary three-dimensional artifacts, such as Huey Long’s signed autobiography, campaign materials, Civil War era swords, and even Jimmie Davis’ cowboy hat and boots.”

The exhibit opened Nov. 20 and will remain available for viewing by the public until March 10, 2021. It is housed in the exhibition area of the Center on the third floor of Sims Library on Southeastern's campus. Interested individuals are invited to visit, but masks are required and social distancing will be maintained.



Pictured (left to right): Graduate Assistants Bailey Hall Sones, Abigail Simmons, and Amelia Haag at the "Pioneers in Politics Exhibit."

For more information on the exhibit, call the Center at 985-549-2151.

Young-Sanders Partnership

In the last issue of the *Centerpiece* we announced a new partnership between the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies and the Young Sanders Center which combines the resources of the two centers to advance scholarly research on Louisiana and surrounding regions of the South. At that time we noted the merger included the creation of two scholarly prizes – the J. Y. Sanders Research Scholar Award, designed to advance the research of an established scholar, and the Young Sanders Center Graduate Assistantship, which will support student research. Both awards will be based in the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies at Southeastern Louisiana University. Supported by a bequeath from Mary Elizabeth Sanders, the partnership and the accompanying awards program began this spring with the Research Scholar award carrying a \$10,000 stipend and the Graduate Assistantship including full tuition at Southeastern, along with a \$13,000 stipend to advance research and cover services provided to facilitate the partnership.

Despite the emergence of the coronavirus and the need to alter award deadlines following the initial March 2020 call for applicants, Center Director Sam Hyde remained excited

about the project, noting “the mission of our two entities perfectly support one another, and we are delighted to have the infusion of resources and research materials the partnership will eventually provide.” According to Hyde, “The Young Sanders Center is currently based in Franklin, Louisiana, but the Sanders family maintained a home in Hammond, and Congressman Sanders represented a portion of the Florida Parishes during his tenure in Congress. The partnership represents a good fit for research collaboration and collections acquisitions.”



Pictured: Jared Young Sanders, Sr.

Following the 1 June application deadline, a committee with representatives from the Center, the Sanders Center, and the University community convened to select candidates. Competition was fierce, but the committee eventually settled on the winners after several rounds of winnowing down the field. Dr. Michael Martin of the University of Louisiana Lafayette and Colin Mathison, an M.A. candidate at Southeastern, have been named the inaugural J. Y. Sanders Research Scholar and Sanders Graduate Research Assistant, respectively. Both recipients expect their work to result in groundbreaking publications furthering understanding of Louisiana's unique past.

Martin, a professor of history and managing editor of the scholarly journal *Louisiana History*, will use the \$10,000 award to complete his research of the Louisiana congressional delegation during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. He is the author of the 2014 book *Russell Long: A Life in Politics*. Mathison, currently in his final year of the master's program in History at Southeastern, plans to use



Pictured (left to right): Director of the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies Dr. Sam Hyde, Bee Martin Little, Fritz Martin, Evelyn McGee, Colin Mathison, Dr. Michael Martin, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Dean Dr. Karen Fontenot, Vice President for University Advancement Wendy Lauderdale, and Senior Director of Development Katherine Rose.

the \$13,000 graduate research award to complete his master's thesis highlighting the connection between the West Florida Revolt and the Texas Revolution. He will also serve as a graduate research assistant in the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies.

Ultimately the conference coordinator and association president Jeffrey Owens from Tyler Junior College, the association's executive officer Deanne Stephens, and the Center's own Sam Hyde reached an accord to proceed. All agreed that the conference needed to take place. Many association members stressed how important the face-to-face discussions that made the conference such a success were. Most agreed a socially distanced gathering was needed to ensure the continuation of the GSHA Conference.

Gulf South Historical Association

Each year the Center and its staff play an active role in the Gulf South Historical Association as well as in its annual historical conference. 2020 was no different—although this year's conference proved more challenging than previous outings. The spread of the coronavirus in 2020 prompted the wholesale cancellation of most regularly scheduled in-person events across the country. Many of the major historical associations either jettisoned their annual meetings or conducted them in a virtual format.

Leaders of the GSHA were thus confronted with a critical decision regarding the fate of the early October conference scheduled to take place at the historic Hotel Bentley in downtown Alexandria. Countless emails and phone calls between conference stakeholders took place to determine the feasibility of safely hosting the conference. No one wanted the conference to go down in history as a "super-spreader" event, so abundant caution was exercised throughout the deliberation process.



Pictured (left to right): Dr. Douglas Bristol, incoming GSHA President, and Dr. Jeffery Owens, outgoing GSHA President pass the ceremonial gavel

A virtual conference is simply not the same as an in-person meeting. A critical factor in the decision was the Hotel Bentley's assurances that conference rooms would be disinfected throughout the day and that rigorous social distancing protocols would be maintained. Of course, conference participants were expected to don a mask in meeting areas and were given the option of presenting virtually if they were uncomfortable presenting in-person owing to the coronavirus or if their home institutions refused to authorize travel. A hybrid in-person and virtual conference was planned—something the association had never tried before. Event organizers had their fingers crossed as they coordinated the conference schedule to meet the needs of the group's diverse membership.

This year's conference which took place on 1-3 October included special theme sessions on "Faith, Hope & Charity, in the Gulf South & the Caribbean World." Considering the foreboding that preceded the conference, things could not have gone more smoothly. Participants were delighted that the conference was held at all and without hesitancy followed the various COVID restrictions in place. Center graduate assistant Amelia Haag covered the registration table throughout the conference and ran point as the conference trouble shooter. With a sizable number of virtual attendees, Ms. Haag was run ragged in her efforts to ensure the sessions went off without a hitch. We are grateful for her services.

In addition to tackling the logistics of the conference, the Center staff participated in the intellectual exchange. Dr. Sam Hyde, besides serving on the GSHA Board of Directors and as the association's treasurer, presented a paper titled: "Whitecaps vs. the Lumber Companies: Terror in the Timber Industry in Southeast Louisiana and Southwest Mississippi, 1890-1915," in addition to chairing a session. Center assistant director Keith Finley, who was elected to the GSHA Board this year, presented a paper titled: "Integration and Excommunication: Archbishops Rummel and Cody Chasten Party Boss Leander Perez," while also chairing three sessions at the conference. Finally, the Center's newest graduate assistant and Young Sanders award recipient Colin Mathison presented his work titled: "A Tale of Two Republics: West Florida, Texas, and the American Quest for Continental Dominance."

As the conference came to an end, the GSHA leadership breathed a collective sigh of relief at having pulled off a safe and successful conference despite pandemic fears. We believe the organization has provided a

model for other organizations that want to avoid yet another year of impersonal Zoom conferences and/or canceled events.



Pictured (left to right): Graduate Assistants Colin Mathison and Amelia Haag at the 2020 GSHA Conference

Preparations for the 2021 GSHA conference are well underway. Special theme sessions on "War and Society" along the Gulf Coast are planned. Dr. Douglas Bristol from the University of Southern Mississippi will serve as the association's president and conference coordinator. This year we will return to the Natchez Grand Hotel in beautiful downtown Natchez along the Mississippi on October 7-9, 2021.

Additional conference details can be found at:
<https://gulfsouthhistoricalassociation.weebly.com>
To register for the event please visit:
http://www.southeastern.edu/alumni_donors/foundation/giving/gshhconf/index.html

New Collections

Despite the challenges faced in 2020, the Center continued to take in new collections as soon as we reopened following the required spring lockdown. Donna Gay Anderson added to the already impressive Anderson Family Collection with the donation of material related to Southeastern Louisiana University legend Vonnie Borden. Long-time Center friends Ralph Shaw and Clark Forrest augmented their preexisting collections, while additions were also made to the collection of Bertha Neff who served as the archivist at the St. Tammany Parish Clerk of Court Office for many years.

Music fans are no doubt aware of the Center's impressive collection dedicated to jazz legend and Southeastern alumni Bill Evans. To it was added an impressive CD featuring a previously lost recording of a live 1968 Evans performance at Ronnie's Scott in England. Also in the theme of music, the Center added several Southeastern Louisiana University Silver Jubilee albums donated by David Wall.

Likewise, we received a donation from the family of Patricia Saik, whose father was the first Lebanese mayor of Hammond, serving three terms in the position. The collection highlights her remarkable career as a civil rights and employee's rights attorney as well as her stint with the Department of Labor in the 1980s. Furthermore, Antoinette Harrell graciously added to both her collection and to the Dr. Kingsley B. Garrison Collection, as well as helped secure a new Richardson Family Funeral Home Collection donated by Earl Richardson Jr. and Valerie Richardson.

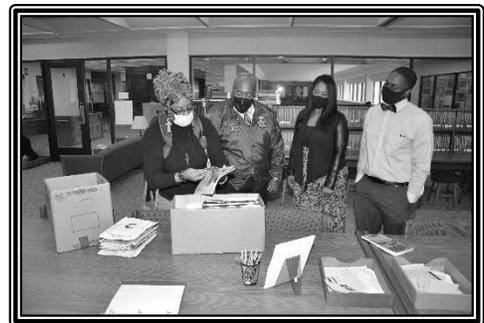
At the time of publication, we have completed cataloguing the mammoth Irene Morris Collection focusing on the Kentwood area and the first installment of the Rod Lincoln Collection which will make the Center the place to go for people interested in the history of Plaquemines Parish.

We want to thank all of our donors, especially all who gifted the Center with a cash donation. We also urge others who might be in possession of historical items associated with this region to consider making a donation to the Center.

Southeast Louisiana Historical Association

The Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies remains deeply committed to the Southeast Louisiana Historical Association. Preparations for the spring 2020 meeting were underway early in the year until the spread of COVID-19 necessitated the cancellation of the event. Social distancing guidelines rendered our usual meeting and associated festivities impossible. As the pandemic worsened, SELHA events were postponed for the remainder of the year. Despite the trials the year presented, the organization remained strong and its membership committed to forging ahead. Preparations are currently underway for a possible early May 2021 SELHA meeting that will feature presentations by the inaugural J. Y. Sanders Scholar Dr. Michael Martin and the Young Sanders Research Assistant Colin Mathison. At this point only tentative plans can be made as we await the results of curve flattening initiatives and vaccination efforts. If the window of opportunity opens, we will expedite our planning and send word to supporters regarding the exact time and date of our spring gathering. Regardless of what the next few months brings, we will continue to promote the SELHA as it is an essential conduit for the dissemination of knowledge concerning our region's peculiar history and an important town and gown organization that unites the local community. After many months in quarantine, we look forward to again meeting with you all face-to-face.

On a related note, we are gathering articles for inclusion in our peer reviewed journal, *Southeast Louisiana Review*. If you have an article you would like to see published we urge you to consider sending it to us for consideration of inclusion in the journal.



Pictured: Antoinette Harrell delivering donations with members of the Richardson family

CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA STUDIES

The Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies is always pleased to receive letters, printed materials, and photographs, which help document the history and the cultures of our region. We can, if necessary, copy photographs and manuscripts for historical research and return the originals to their owners. For more information about contributing materials or about the Center, please contact:

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Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies
Third Floor, Morrison Room

Linus A. Sims Memorial Library
Hours: 8:00am-5:00pm Monday-Thursday
8:00am- 12:30 Friday

http://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/csls

Mission:

The Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies preserves and promotes the history and the cultures of Louisiana's Florida Parishes, southwestern Mississippi, and surrounding areas through scholarly research, conferences, film productions, and publishing.

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