

Archives provide area history

By TOM WILEMON
UNA Student Writer

Sunlight angles through the basement window into the Archives Collection at Collier Library. A University of North Alabama student sits holding a faded photograph of an unknown child.

"When I get to working, I expect to look over my shoulder and see a ghost behind me," said Janet Hudiberg.

But the student library assistant never sees any ghosts. Although the room's constant temperature of 60-64 degrees can send a chill up a spine, the Archives Collection is not the kind of place where ghosts hang out. The lights are too bright and the corners clean of cobwebs.

College professors, students, historical researchers and Shoals area residents come here to read the letter that W.C. Handy wrote to a Florence mayor, flip through the pages of George "Goober" Lindsey's personal scripts from the "Andy Griffith Show," see what Wilson Dam looked like during construction and hold the bill of sale for a Negro slave named John.

"This is not a dusty old place where old letters come to die," said Hudiberg. "When you read those letters, people come back to life."

She related the story of a young man's death at the battle of Murfreesboro, Tenn. He was a Sannoner, a direct descendant of surveyor Ferdinand Sannoner

who named the Alabama town he designed after his home, Florence, Italy. The Archives Collection contains the Sannoner family papers.

However, the Archives Collection does not house genealogical material.

"We do not have or seek this kind of information," said Linda Dotzheimer, an assistant librarian at UNA. "We do have and do seek family papers of historical significance. We will take any archives we can get, primarily letters and photographs. What we are interested in is history of UNA, the Shoals area, and North Alabama."

The library is currently seeking editions of the "Purple and Gold," an early UNA college yearbook, and "The Purple Owl," a forerunner of UNA's art and literary magazine "Lights and Shadows." Family diaries, church histories, and biographical information on area notables are always wanted.

Dotzheimer expressed her appreciation to all those who had donated material to the library, but she pointed out that the Archives Collection is not a museum.

"So many people think we're a museum. They give us old clothes and tools which we don't want."

UNA librarians often get information requests from persons across the country and around the world.

"Being an archivist is like being Sherlock Holmes," said Dotzheimer, who is in charge of

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—Janet Hudiberg.

the Archives Collection. Last year she received a letter from a Tokyo man who was writing a book on the American education reforms in post-war Japan. He wanted to know about the extent of E.B. Norton's involvement with the U.S. education mission. Norton would later become the president of Florence State Teachers College (UNA).

Dotzheimer looked in the archives for Norton's papers, but found none. After a campus-wide search, she discovered the papers in the basement of Bibb Graves Hall.

Dotzheimer was part of another detective jaunt when Civil War soldiers had to be identified from a glass negative.

"The Tennessee Valley Historical Society helped us identify the soldiers by their belt buckles and rifles," she said.

For those people who wish to keep historical material in their closets and attics, she cautioned about the threat of insects and changing weather conditions.

She also said newspapers should be separated from other materials since they are printed on a low grade paper with an acidic character.

"This acid migrates and destroys anything it touches," she said. "Storing things in cardboard boxes is just one step above newspapers."

Elderly persons should identify old photographs and other historical material to their descendants so that this information will not be lost to future generations, according to Dotzheimer.

Professor emeritus Maureen Maness was responsible for gathering many of the documents preserved in Collier Library.

The Archives Collection can be used 9 a.m. - 12 noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 2 - 3:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays during the 1986 spring semester. Other times can be set up by appointment. For more information, contact Linda Dotzheimer (205) 766-4100, ext. 559.