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DAN UTLEY NEVER PICKED COTTON

By Archie P. McDonald

Editor's Note: The following is Dr. Archie McDonald's Saturday luncheon address at the ETHA Spring meeting in Tyler, Texas. Dr. McDonald became the Executive Director of the East Texas Historical Association in 1971, as, he enjoys pointing out, the "interim director." After thirty-seven years of "interim" work, a tenure that has seen the Association grow into the second largest historical society in the state (only the Texas State Historical Association has more members), he has decided to hand the position over to a West Texan of all things. I would be remiss if I did not pay Dr. McDonald the proper respect of hailing his tenure, something that his grace and humility will not allow him to do.

Unlike so many of our members, I did not have the pleasure of knowing Dr. McDonald for decades. Like many people, I knew "of" Archie McDonald before I "knew" Archie McDonald. What I did know "of" him was, to be honest, somewhat intimidating to a recently minted professional historian. His reputation was well-known and sweeping – one of the most pre-eminent Texas historians, a former president of the Texas State Historical Association, author and editor of an entire library of books, and, of course, the "face" of the East Texas Historical Association. The public reputation is familiar to many.

But in the last year, I have come to actually "know" Archie McDonald, and the man I now appreciate is more than his public persona. He has first and foremost been a diligent and passionate advocate and caretaker of your Association. When he made a decision, you could rest assured that he had the Association's best interests in mind. More than that, he has been a kind and patient mentor, ready and willing to assist in any way he can to help the transition of the Association. Of course, as many of you would tell me, I should have expected no less. The East Texas Historical Association could not have had a better and more able Director, and it is by far the better due to his leadership.

Dr. McDonald may be stepping down from his post as Executive Director of the East Texas Historical Association, but his influence and his wisdom will forever remain. He will continue to be the first person I ask for advice and counsel, recommendations that will be both welcome and seriously accepted. No one should consider this a "retirement address;" for me it will be much closer to George Washington's "Farewell Address," a charge to remember the importance of the ideals the Association is built upon and what it should always aspire to be. I think I can speak for all members when I say, "Thank you Archie for all that you have done and what you have meant to us. We will never forget the lessons that you have taught us."

Linda Cross asked me to present this luncheon talk because Will Jennings backed out. I don't mind being second with Linda; that's still pretty high on the mountain. And I welcome her charge to pronounce a blessing of

transition on Dr. Scott Sosebee, who will become our Association's director soon. More on this point in a few minutes.

But before that, we have a few other things to consider: first, the title for this talk, "Dan Utley Never Picked Cotton," has nothing to do with what follows, except I substituted Dan's name for Steve Allen in the title of Dan's own presidential address presented by Cynthia Beeman while he still had the gall to lay around a hospital in Round Rock, gall-less. The substance of Dan's presentation equaled the title in provocation of interest, so I decided to borrow it, but not be bound by its message. I will say, however, that Immediate Past President Dan Utley is a prince of a fellow, a valued friend to us all, and we thank him for his leadership and especially for his support of we few office staff.

(Now: what follows is a State of The Association At The Transition Report):

In other writings, meetings, and within the pages of the *Journal* we have remembered the pioneering role of the Rev. George Crocket, Episcopal priest and instructor of history at Stephen F. Austin Teachers College, who organized the first East Texas Historical Association in the 1920s, which went out of business in 1932 thanks to the legacy of the Republican Ascendancy during the previous decade, leaving only three \$100 bonds and a box of its bulletins, or journals as souvenirs. Ruth Chamberlain presented those bonds to me from Charlie Chamberlain's files after his passing in 1972, and they helped pay for an issue of the *Journal*. Ralph Goodwin gave us the bulletins a few years later.

We also remembered Drs. Ralph W. Steen and C.K. Chamberlain, and attorneys F.I. Tucker and F. Lee Lawrence, the four Godfathers who founded the present Association. Chamberlain reprised Crocket's call, summoning all patriotic and interested citizens to muster in Nacogdoches on September 29, 1962, to re-organize an East Texas Historical Association. Steen offered money to publish the *Journal* and Chamberlain's time to edit it and empresario Fall and Spring meetings, the first always in Nacogdoches, the second always elsewhere in East Texas. Lawyers Tucker and Lawrence drafted a constitution and incorporation papers and obtained a federal, non-profit tax number; such foresight blesses us still. Their constitution ruled our proceedings until Dr. James Reese revised and modernized it in 1982.

Charter membership remained open a year, so 425 East Texans mustered for the cut; few are left – Ralph Wooster is the only one I know for certain, but there may be others. Lawrence served as first president and thereafter as a board member until his death in 1997. Since Lawrence's initial term, we have made a conscious – even earnest – effort, to alternate presidencies, board memberships, and committee assignments between lay and teaching historians, and to have both represented as authors of articles and reviews in the *Journal*.

Chamberlain retired in 1971. That's when Lawrence and Steen asked me to succeed him – Lawrence made crystal clear – on an interim basis. That

interim ends on August 31st next, the longest in University history at thirty-seven years and fourteen days.

The Association still headquarters on the Stephen F. Austin State University campus and its director and editor must be a faculty member at the host institution, a constitutional requirement. We occupy a three-room suite in the Ferguson Building. The University pays the salary of the director and secretary, who is also the Association's treasurer, the light and phone bills, and provides us computers through my sinecure with the History Department. The Association pays the remainder of its obligations.

For the first two decades the director received a one-course reduction to work for the Association and had the assistance of a half-time secretary; later, the secretary got to work longer hours and the director fewer, going first to a two-course reduction, and in 2006, to teaching only one course in the now kaput Voluntary Modified Appointment program.

Twenty-one ladies have held the post of secretary, one as briefly as four months, and the best, Mrs. Portia Gordon, nearly thirteen years.

In 1971, we had a bank balance of approximately \$1,500 – enough for one more issue of the *Journal*. Thursday, your treasurer reported a total of **\$455,459.00** to the Board of Directors. By design, approximately 80% of that endows various programs and awards.

In 1971, the *Journal's* "March" and "October" issues came out about a year behind schedule. Dr. Steen ordered us to correct that. He agreed to pay the secretary's salary, a reversal of previous practice, and let the Association pay the printer so we could publish the *Journal* through the most cooperative jobber we could find. That turned out to be, and remains, Craftsman Printers of Lubbock, a firm so large I have wondered why they bother with us. One reason is owner Ronald Peters, with whom I did business for more than thirty years before we met, in that old-fashioned Texas way of people saying what they mean and meaning what they say, even on the telephone. The Board knows this, but you may not; Ronald prints the *Journal* for the same fee we paid in 2003, when gasoline cost about \$1.50 for a gallon. Partly that's technology and partly it's Mrs. Gordon doing more of the work, but it remains a miracle.

In 1971, membership hovered around 100; now we have at least **594 members**, and at last, racial diversity.

In 1971, the Board met early of a Saturday morning, followed by 9:00 and 10:45 a.m. sessions, and a luncheon. In the 1980s we moved to Friday afternoon, and then all day Friday sessions, and since the mid-1990s in the Fall, to Thursday afternoon sessions and the Lale Lecture in the evening.

Attendance responds to multiple variables, but here, in Tyler, we once registered only twenty-five people; we had expected fifty but a big storm blew through East Texas on Friday night, discouraging the faint of heart. Now we average above 150 at Spring meetings – the count for 2008 in Tyler stands at **175** – and have registered more than 200 attendees the last two Fall meetings.

Dues remain modest, beginning at \$5 per annum in 1962 and advancing by steps to \$25, and meeting registration has remained at \$25 for a decade. Dues largely cover a subscription to the *Journal* and the registration fee covers other meeting expenses, such as \$21.24 a gallon coffee and \$19.00 a dozen for pastries at this meeting. We work hard to keep meal costs below \$20, succeed most of the time, and hope you will remember that whatever the cost that it includes a compulsory 18% or larger gratuity.

Programmatic changes are significant:

The C.K. Chamberlain Award, the idea of Past President Joe White, honors the "best" article in the *Journal* annually;

Fellows, restricted to twenty-five members who have written much and well about East Texas;

The Best of East Texas Award, funded and presented by Bob and Doris Bowman as lifetime achievement recognition for a distinguished East Texan;

The Ralph W. Steen Award, honoring one who has contributed significantly to the Cause in ways other than writing; and

The Lucille Terry Award, named for a preservation dynamo in Jefferson, Texas, to say "thank you" for an outstanding restoration project.

And we publish more. The Ann and Lee Lawrence East Texas History Series, now with seven volumes, are site-specific monographs on topics of historical – and historic – interest, such as Robert Glover's Camp Ford: Tyler, Texas, CSA, funded through an endowment from Ann and Lee Lawrence, and subsequent sales; and

The Bob and Doris Bowman East Texas History Series which features fuller and more detailed monographs, with two volumes in print – Bill O'Neal's *War In East Texas: Regulator vs Moderators*, and James Smallwood, Ken Howell, and Carol Taylor, authors of *The Devil's Triangle: Ben Bickerstaff, Northeast Texans, And The War Of Reconstruction In Texas*.

We sponsor, with Max's money, the Lale Lectures and bring such prominent figures as Bill Moyers, filmmaker David Grubin, and scholars James Robertson and William Seale to our meetings and SFA's campus. The lecturer for 2008 will be Dr. Don Graham, professor of Southwestern literature at The University of Texas.

With support from foundations and individuals, we have sponsored symposia on Sacred Harp Music, The Neches River, Paper Making in East Texas, last year "The Legacy of Arthur Temple," and, in April 2008, in Jasper, a study of the Toledo Bend project.

And the crown jewel of our endowments, The Ottis Lock Endowment Awards, which annually honors an outstanding educator, book, and provides research grants to encourage more "best books." Funds came exclusively from Mr. Lock's friends and the Pineywoods Foundation.

Our institutional affiliation is firm; SFAs President Baker Pattillo, Provost

Richard Berry, Dean Brian Murphy, and History Chairman Troy Davis seem well disposed to keeping the Association on campus.

Which brings me, finally to The Promised Transition.

Near the beginning of this millennium, Dr. Mark Barringer joined the History Department with a partial assignment to work as associate director/editor until the director/editorship became vacant. Mark took hold with a will, but two things derailed that plan. First, I did not retire as quickly as some assumed and others may have hoped would be the case; and second, Mark's competence was noticed by Dean James Standley, who wooed him with more reduced time, money, and responsibility, into an associate deanship. Last September, that position advanced to full-time employment with Dean Murphy.

Fortunately, also last year, the History Department hired Dr. Scott Sosebee to teach Texas history when Mark or I did not, since it must be offered every semester. From the git go, then, Scott really is more of a genuine, trained historian of Texas history than either Mark or I. And, Scott was willing. So last September, the Board appointed Scott to that waiting associate-ship with a clear understanding that this time the waiting surely would end on September 1 – this year, when my VME appointment goes *sine die*.

Actually, the process began last September and accelerates after this meeting. Scott already handles all the editing except book reviews, which I still do as they come into the office as a matter of convenience, but he is deciding who many of the reviewers will be. Scott was part of every major program or site decision regarding this meeting, and this will be complete for the Fall meeting. It is crucial that the person charged with trying to keep you untroubled by hotel glitches and similar but inevitable problems, be involved completely in all the planning. Scott has been, and will continue to be so involved.

Scott has my unqualified endorsement and pledge of cooperation. After August, Scott will have to ask; until then, I'll offer plenty of "free advice," with the caveat that such will be worth just what he pays for it!

I could not close without paying tribute to Mrs. Portia Gordon, my friend and office partner for a dozen or more years. Mrs. Gordon has been, altogether, the perfect office partner. By now, we know each other's family troubles and general interests, and I stand in awe of her remarkable memory for names and general "people skills." It has not escaped my notice, or that of others, that attendance at meetings picked up considerably after Mrs. Gordon took over registration and the general administration of meetings.

And, we got Charlie Gordon in the bargain to video Lale Lectures, assemble and disassemble easels, lug boxes of registration materials, and generally be available for whatever needs doing – all this for an extra chocolate dessert.

I'll not make recommendations for what to drop or to carry on or to expand other than what I recommended to your Board on Thursday. You have a competent new director and a Board determined to advance the Association.

I hope you agree that all is well now, and join me in confident expectation that all will only get better.

And you know, on second thought, it does not matter that Dan Utley never picked cotton. He turned out pretty well anyway. But...

There are all kinds of Farewells, from "You're not going to have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore," to Robert E. Lee's "After...years of arduous service...I bid you a fond and affectionate farewell," to Douglas MacArthur's "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." None of these are appropriate today. I am not planning to go away, corpulence suggests that I'm far from fading, and "arduous service" hardly applies – those thirty-seven years were and mostly still are fun. I once lived on a farm and my father-in-law, B. L. Barrett took me to the woods to clear and develop land, so I have seen real work once or twice...serving as director of the East Texas Historical Association is fun. I work in air conditioning and wear a suit doing it.

Finally, veteran hearers of my reports to the Board of Directors have noted that they usually concluded with a metaphor that "the ship sails on." There are reasons why I have associated seafaring with this service, beginning with the "sailing" concept of a continuum of ports of call in Beaumont, Galveston, Huntsville, College Station, Marshall, Tyler, and other places, and a home mooring in Nacogdoches. And then there are these words of Grady Nutt: "Not our choice the wind's direction, unforeseen the calm or gale, Thy great ocean swells before us, and our ship seems small and frail. Fierce and gleaming is Thy mystery, drawing us to shores unknown; plunge us on with hope and courage, 'til Thy harbor is our home!"

No longer the wanderer and with MY home port in sight, my wish for the Association and for each of you, is – "Bon Voyage!"