



## MSU COLLECTION PRESERVES STATE'S RURAL HERITAGE

By Bob Ratliff

In 1848, a clerk in Monroe County, Mississippi carefully folded the deed to a tract of land in north Mississippi before placing it in an envelope with the inscription: "Please keep in this envelope and pass it on to your successors."

For more than 150 years the deed, as well as the land that is part of the Lenoir Plantation in Monroe County, was handed down from generation to generation of the Lenoir family. Today, the deed is one of thousands of documents and other items in the Lenoir Collection at MSU's Mitchell Memorial Library.

The items related to the Lenoir Plantation are part of the materials being preserved by the Consortium for the History of Agricultural and Rural Mississippi, or CHARM.

The goal of the CHARM project is to ensure the preservation and access to materials related to Mississippi's rural heritage, said Mattie L. Sink, manuscripts librarian for MSU Libraries.

"The materials in the CHARM collection document everything from small farms to large-scale corporate agriculture," she said. "They also range from items related to the beginnings of Mississippi's agricultural

heritage, such as those in the Lenoir collection, to material from recently retired individuals."

Most of the individuals who donate materials to the collection do so out of a desire to preserve knowledge of Mississippi's past and to ensure that future generations will have access to items that give first-hand accounts of rural life in the state. That was the motivation behind Betty and Whitman Lenoir's donation of the items from their family's ancestral home.

"We could not properly preserve the documents and other items," Betty Lenoir said. "By donating them to the library at MSU, we knew they would be preserved and made available for others to use and enjoy."

Established in 2002, the CHARM project has already brought together an impressive array of documents and artifacts. Among the more unique material is the "Farm Family of the Week" collection.

Farm Family of the Week was a program developed for WLBT-TV in Jackson by Howard Langfitt. It aired from 1955 until 1961 and each week featured a family within the WLBT viewing area that met standards for farming excellence set by Langfitt and county Extension agents in the area.

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MATTIE L. SINK



*Betty and Whitman Lenoir, opposite page, look over some of the documents from the family's Monroe County plantation. Student worker Leanne Sloan, above, checks negative in the CHARM photo collection. Folder, below, contains an early 1800s map of the Lenoir plantation.*



The collection consists of scripts and photos used on the program and is a rich source of information for individuals doing genealogical research on the families featured on the program.

Sam Wilkes of Starkville used the Farm Family of the Week Collection while doing research on members of the Laird family of Jefferson Davis County, who were featured on a 1955 program.

“The pictures in the collection are excellent and the scripts are very informative about how they were operating their dairy and other farm activities,” he said. “In addition, the library staff is very accommodating to individuals doing this type of research.”

Another important part of the CHARM collection is oral histories from individuals who have first-hand knowledge of the state's rural past.

“These individuals are a valuable resource and having their stories in their own words provides insights that are not available from other sources,” Sink said. “Mississippi has a rich and diverse rural past, and we're using CHARM to collect material on all aspects of that past.”

To make the CHARM materials more accessible, the library staff is digitizing materials in the collection and making them available on the World Wide Web at <http://library.msstate.edu/charm>.

Partners in the CHARM project include the MSU Libraries, the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, the MSU Extension Service, the College of Veterinary Medicine, the college of Forest Resources, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Families and individuals who wish to preserve material related to Mississippi's rural heritage can contact the MSU Libraries about a possible donation. Materials accepted for the CHARM collection will be preserved, cataloged and made available for research use.

For additional information on CHARM, contact Sink at (662) 325-3848, or by email at [msink@library.msstate.edu](mailto:msink@library.msstate.edu).

