

# CELEBRATING OUR SESQUICENTENNIAL: USING GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS AND ARCHIVAL MATERIALS TO TELL OUR LAND-GRANT STORY

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## BEGINNING THE PROCESS:

The Special Collections and Archives Department was tasked with creating an exhibit to celebrate Auburn University's sesquicentennial as a land-grant institution. We chose to focus on the very beginning of the land-grant initiative and the university's first year of inception, emphasizing the procedural documents surrounding the two correlating events. This was the perfect opportunity to showcase materials from the university archives and from Government Documents, as well!

## QUESTIONS:

- How could we incorporate both archival materials and government documents in such a way that their connection was clear to viewers?
- How could we make the exhibit accessible to viewers who might not be familiar with the subject?
- How could we make the exhibit entertaining and informative for viewers who were already knowledgeable about the subject?

## WHAT WE DID:

First, we used an early 1900s cadet uniform—an item distinct to the university's history—as the key point of focus for the exhibit.

We then arranged the two exhibit cases to serve as a visual timeline of the founding of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama (Auburn University), working from left to right, top to bottom.

The first exhibit case served as a quick history lesson on the beginnings of the land-grant initiative to give context for those unfamiliar with the concept; it featured an excerpt from the Morrill Act, pictures of President Abraham Lincoln and Congressman Justin Morrill, and documents from the Serial Set indicating Alabama had elected to participate in the new land-grant program and addressing the formation of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama as a land-grant institution.

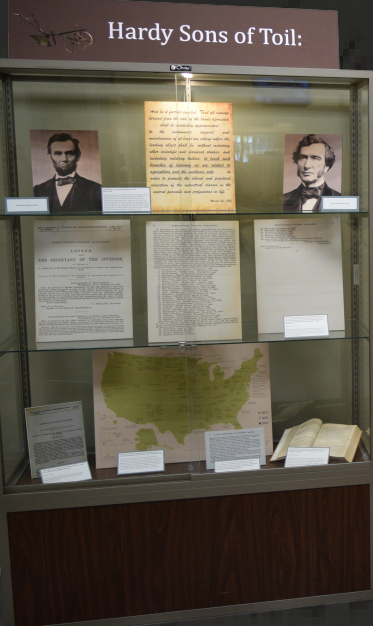
The second case sought to connect with viewers at the local level by humanizing the documents on display and reiterating the effect of national decisions on local individuals. Small artifacts that had once belonged to early university students were included, as well as the university's board minutes showing the selection of the first university president, Isaac Taylor Tichenor; the university's course catalog showing the engineering, agricultural, and military focus that was a prerequisite for land-grant colleges; pages from the student registry with the handwritten names of the first students; and a photograph of an early student wearing his cadet uniform.

## OUR FINDINGS:

- The government documents and archival materials curated were very specific in their focus. This made the connection between each item clear at a glance.
- Arranging the materials in a progressive format plainly indicated how the local university was affected by a national decision.
- Including artifacts that once belonged to former students helped make the exhibit eye-catching and the viewing experience more personal.

## POINTS OF INTEREST:

- \* We used Adobe software to create facsimiles of most of the government documents used, adding a bit of sepia tone to the images in order to create a sense of realism and to immediately indicate the documents' age to viewers. The documents were also enlarged significantly to make the small print more accessible.
- \* Adobe software was also utilized to colorize the photograph of the first university president and a photograph of an early student. This was the first time these pictures had been seen in such a lifelike way, and we hoped that it would generate a feeling of personal connection.



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