



FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Released May 13, 1999

MISSISSIPPI FAMILY DONATES RECORDS

HATTIESBURG, Miss. -- One of South Mississippi's pioneer families has donated memorabilia and records of its longtime business interests to the University of Southern Mississippi Archives.

Records of the Richton-based Ben M. Stevens family date back to 1830 and represent a valuable contribution to the USM Archives, said Dr. Bobs Tusa, university archivist.

The Richton Tie and Timber Company is the Stevens family's best-known remaining business interest. The family patriarch, Ben M. Stevens Sr., served as Richton mayor for 40 years.

A Stevens ancestor, Capt. Benjamin Franklin Stevens, founded the parent store of the Ben M. Stevens Company in 1867 after he had served as a cavalry officer under Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest during the Civil War. The Stevens Store was Richton's oldest and largest commercial operation until it closed in 1988.

Ben M. Stevens Sr. traveled from Collins to Richton in 1911 to work at what would become the Stevens store, then owned by his uncle. After the uncle died, Stevens incorporated the store in 1930 as B.M. Stevens Company and operated it until his death in 1978. Stevens' sons -- Ben Stevens Jr., Henry Stevens and Forrest Stevens -- and his daughter Daisy's husband, D.O. Thoms, all held positions within the company.

Stevens established the Richton Tie and Timber Co. in 1926 and soon became the state's largest timber suppliers to the Laurel-based Masonite Corp. In 1935, Richton Tie and Timber became a separate corporation from other Stevens assets.

Besides his business interests and serving as Richton mayor, Stevens organized one of the first American Legion units in the state, served as governor of the local Rotary Club and was the first member named to the Mississippi State Game and Fish Commission.

The Stevens Family Business Records and other papers will be available for research as soon as they are preserved and processed, Tusa said. Such an extensive collection will provide generations of historians with valuable materials that document an important period in the history of Mississippi's timber history, Tusa said.

Persons with materials that document the history of Southern Miss, Hattiesburg or Mississippi may contact Tusa about possible donations at (601) 266-4348. The USM Archives website is online at www.lib.usm.edu/archives.