

Rhode Island benefactors continue support at Mississippi State with endowed faculty chair



Former Rhode Island Chief Justice Frank J. Williams and his wife, Virginia, are pictured at Mississippi State’s Mitchell Memorial Library, home of the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana. (Photo by Beth Wynn)

STARKVILLE, Miss.— Justice Frank J. Williams Former Rhode Island Chief and his wife, Virginia, have

Doom and Gloom

I can’t help but believe most of you are like me hating to turn on the news or look at the internet because all we see is “doom and gloom”. If we are not listening to statistics about COVID, or the Delta variant, it’s horrendous fires in California or some other state, the horrific warfare that is going on in the Middle East, the unusual heat waves that is taking people’s lives, some other tragedy, or drive-by shootings just to name a few of the calamities. Even the prime-time television shows are nothing but based on violence and heartbreak.



Peggy’s Take

Do you remember The Beverly Hillbillies with the calamity being how Granny was going to get the fixings for her “medicine/moonshine?” Leave it to Beaver and what June Cleaver would make for their supper. How did Jeannie really get into that magic bottle? And, Andy Griffith, was there ever such an easy-going sheriff and no gun? No video games to teach our young how to annihilate a foe. People with guns were only out in the woods tracking food for their families. Now everybody has a gun. If you cannot legally purchase one you can always buy it off the street from someone who needs a dollar.

Dope was someone we thought maybe not so smart. Drugs were what my mama

called the settlements made after boiling tea or coffee. We had no idea about the junk sold on the street corners.

What in the world happened? Where did we lose the good things in the world? When did our values change from Andy Griffith to shows like Training Day and other “shoot em ups”. As a child and I might admit even now I can scare myself at times if I think of paranormal things. So now instead of watching Casper, we have the Walking Dead. Who wants to watch dead people attack people? Not Me!!

My children are all grown now, and I have, hopefully instilled some good ideals into their lives, some that they have passed down to their children and that they in turn will pass down to my great grands.

I’m closing now because Barney has a date with Thelma Lou I really want to see. I make this lots when I am in a hurry.

BEAN AND WIENNIE CASSEROILE

1 15 oz can of baked beans, 1 chopped onion, ½ cup chopped bell pepper, ¼ cup ketchup, 2 T. worcheshire sauce. To this add 6 chopped wieners and bake for 30 minutes at 350*

Peggy Sims is a life-long resident of Attala County and columnist.

established an endowed faculty chair dedicated to the study of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War at Mississippi State University.

The Rhode Island couple gifted their collection of Abraham Lincoln and Civil War memorabilia, valued at nearly \$3 million, to the university in 2017. Considered the nation’s largest privately owned holding of Lincoln research and display material, the Frank J. and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana has positioned MSU among the nation’s leading centers for study of the Civil War.

Building on their previous support of the land-grant institution, the Williams’ most recent gift will further MSU’s ability to pioneer meaningful engagements and enhanced understandings regarding the social and political implications of the Civil War era. It also secures the first endowed faculty position to be housed within MSU Libraries.

“The enduring support of Frank and Virginia Williams for Mississippi State University and the MSU Libraries is remarkable,” said Tommy Anderson, interim Dean of Libraries. “With this latest gift, Judge Williams and Virginia have ensured a legacy of incredible scholarship that will be felt at MSU for many years to come.”

The Frank and Virginia Williams Chair for Abraham Lincoln and Civil War Studies position will be two-fold, with responsibilities in both the MSU Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences’ African American Studies program. Although the duties in the two areas differ in function, they share a collective purpose for teaching and inspiring current and future generations on the importance of history in contem-

porary society.

At Mitchell Memorial Library, the chair holder will manage the Williams Collection of Lincolniana and assist with the ongoing development of the Frank and Virginia Williams Lecture Series on Abraham Lincoln and Civil War Studies. In addition to facilitating smooth department operations including reference and description, collection development, acquisitions and accession, digitization, and storage and curatorial responsibilities related to the exhibits and engagements, the chair will serve as a liaison between the university and the public to promote and aid with accessibility to the valuable resources.

The chair also will share a teaching load within the African American Studies program and develop courses within their academic area of specialty utilizing the Williams Collection. The program’s interdisciplinary methodology currently helps students explore the history and culture of African descended people to develop skills and sensitivities that will assist them with effective function and navigation in today’s global world. By incorporating studies from the Civil War era within the program, the chair can help students grow their understanding of significant historical events and perceptions that remain relevant.

“Endowed chairs such as this are instrumental in both recruiting and retaining the most talented scholars. The African American Studies program, the U.S. Grant Presidential Library, and indeed the entire university community will benefit from the teaching and scholarship this endowment will help to facilitate,” said Don Shaffer, MSU director of African American Studies. “As our nation continues to grapple with a history of slavery, race and the Civil War, this endowed chair will provide scholars in the years to come with the tools and resources needed to explore the full complexity of our collective story.”

Earnings from the endowment will be used to supplement the salary of the position, develop the Williams Lecture Series, process the existing collection, and provide for new acquisitions, as well as fund relevant travel and research grants to advance programming.

“Faculty are the backbone of an educational institution, and this endowed chair is the perfect conduit to further appreciate this resource and educate more young people,” said Justice Williams. “I hope this chair and the collections assist in the continued healing of a divided country. As the collection grows and con-

tinues to be used as a resource both in and outside of the university, the chair holder will also be a paragon and leader for progress, understanding and healing among all future graduates of MSU—regardless of their career path—because Lincoln was a man for all people in all seasons.”

Justice Williams is a graduate of Boston University and Boston University Law School, and earned a Master of Taxation degree from Bryant University. A longtime jurist in the Rhode Island court system, he served on the state’s Superior Court beginning in 1995 before ascending to the Supreme Court bench in 2001, serving as chief justice until his retirement in 2009. He is a veteran of the U.S. Army, having served three years in Germany and one in Vietnam.

A noted historian and longtime president of the Ulysses S. Grant Association, Williams was instrumental in bringing the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library to MSU. He also is the founding chair of The Lincoln Forum and has served on both the United States Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and as a board member of its successor organization, the Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation.

In 2006, MSU’s Pre-Law Society awarded Williams its prestigious Distinguished Jurist Award and in 2018, the university presented him with an honorary Doctor of Public Service degree. He is an acclaimed author and popular lecturer who has served as the graduation speaker for multiple MSU commencement ceremonies.

Virginia Williams is a Texas native and gradu-

ate of North Texas State University. She served as a teacher overseas for the U.S. Department of Defense in Germany and Okinawa, before teaching kindergarten in the Cranston, Rhode Island, public schools for nearly three decades.

Her involvement with the Richmond Historical Society inspired her research endeavors in historical buildings, especially out-houses, about which she has lectured across the country. She is a former president of the Museum of Art and Culture in Peace Dale, Rhode Island, and has been deeply involved with The Lincoln Forum since its inception.

The Williams Collection is housed in Mitchell Memorial Library and more than 100 items from the collection are showcased in a nearly 1,200-square-foot space designated as the gallery for the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana. The library is also home to the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, the Ulysses S. Grant Association, and the Congressional and Political Research Center.

For more information on the collection or ways to support MSU Libraries, contact Trish Cunetto, director of development, at 662-325-6762 or tcunetto@foundation.msstate.edu.

MSU is one of only six U.S. universities to house a presidential library. For more, visit www.usgrantlibrary.org.

MSU is Mississippi’s leading university, available online at www.msstate.edu.

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