

Connis O. Brown, Jr. – The man behind the name

For the 97.8% of VAGARA members who never knew Connis O. Brown, did you ever wonder who was the man behind the name of VAGARA's conference scholarship?

Connis Ostin Brown, Jr. was born March 21, 1932 and was from just outside of Franklinton, NC, north of Raleigh. After high school, he wandered for about a year working for the Town of Franklinton, and then from 1951 to 1955 served his country in the Navy. Following his military service, Connis went back to North Carolina to continue his education, first graduating from Louisburg Junior College, and then entering East Carolina College, where he completed a B. S. in Social Studies in 1960.

He immediately went to work in the Local Records Section of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History. He started out moving around the state, inventorying and microfilming records in courthouses and local governments. At some point in the next three years, with the goal of moving up, he attended the Modern Archives Institute in Washington, DC. Soon thereafter, his then boss, Admiral A. M. Patterson, recommended a job for him in Maryland's Hall of Records. In July 1963 Connis became a public records examiner. He was based in Annapolis, but also oversaw the Records Center located in Baltimore, which he visited every Friday.

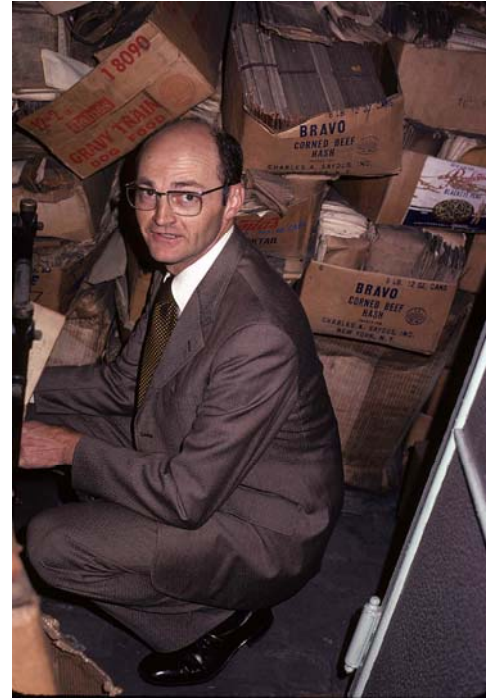
While continuing with this job, he attended American University on a part time basis, and finished a Masters of Public Administration, with a concentration in Management of Archival Institutions.

In July of 1971 Connis answered the call of Dr. Louis Manarin, then Virginia's State Archivist, to complete a study of local records-keeping procedures and to head up the Local Records Program at the Virginia State Library (forerunner to the Library of Virginia), *if* the results of the study justified it. This study was commissioned by the Virginia General Assembly as a result of the December 1970 Botetourt County courthouse fire. The findings of the study did justify the new program, and with another act of the General Assembly, Virginia's Local Records Program began in earnest in July 1972.

Connis' job then was to talk with circuit court clerks about allowing the Library's new microfilm camera operators into their offices to film the permanent court and land volumes for security. Along with that he was also talking with the clerks about transferring their records to the state archives for better storage conditions. Along the way, he gained oversight of the Library's fledgling records management program, garnered the title of Assistant State Archivist for Records, and earned the Certified Records Manager designation.

Connis Brown's commitment to the records industry went beyond the walls of the commonwealth's Library and Archives. During his short thirteen years of service to Virginia's public records keepers, he was President of the Virginia Microfilm Association for two terms (1973 – 1975), Secretary and Vice President for ARMA's Richmond Chapter, and Chairman of Committee 18 on Standards for Microfilming Public Records—Association of Information and Image Management; receiving several citations from these organizations.

He wrote and spoke extensively on the establishment and operation of local records programs and microfilming. His work helped create and enforce quality standards throughout Virginia. One of his first



printed articles, published in *The National MICRO-NEWS* (journal of the National Microfilm Association) in 1967, chronicled the procedural microfilm recording of current land records in Prince George's County, Maryland. This publication became the foundation for the procedural microfilming procedures in selected courthouses across this commonwealth. He also produced a publication entitled "The Antiquated Archivist." If anyone knows of an extant copy, this writer would be grateful to hear about it.

In talking with some who used to work with Connis, it doesn't take long to know that he was a well respected man and on occasions a slightly feared force with whom to be reckoned. Dr. Manarin remembers him as a man who "was honest with you and you could count on him." When Connis set out to do a job, it got done. There are several former camera operators who could spend hours telling stories of the "surprise visits from Mr. Brown." Never quite knowing when he would pop into a courthouse anywhere across the state undoubtedly helped ensure the integrity of the commonwealth's circuit court security microfilm.

He was also a man not without his own personal brand of humor. He inspired Breck Daughtrey, a C. O. Brown protégé, and current VAGARA member, to pen *The Ballad of Connis O. Brown*. This ode will soon be found on the VAGARA website within the scholarship section. Dick Harrington, former Assistant State Archivist for Imaging, and current VAGARA honorary member, recalls a time when Connis, knowing that he was without a current will and probably needing one soon, called on Dick and another now-former Library employee, Langhorne Francis, to help draft and witness the holographic document that was to be written against the roof of a car in the parking lot of Connis' apartment on yellow paper in red pencil. Harrington recalls Connis' words being something to the effect of "Let's see them microfilm that one effectively in one take."

Unfortunately, it wouldn't be long before that will would be needed. Connis had been smacked with cancer in March of 1982. He dealt with it like everything else in his life, head on and no holds barred; he even underwent experimental treatments. He beat it the first time, but it came back with a vengeance, cutting short the life of Connis O. Brown on September 21, 1984. During this time frame, VAGARA was in its beginning stages, and the founding members deemed it highly appropriate to remember the work and legacy of this man by naming the scholarship of Virginia's newest government records association after him.

At the time of this writing Connis is still survived by his 95-year old mother Gladys R. Brown; his wife Anne, who continues to wear out microfilm reader number 8 at the Library of Virginia as a certified genealogist (and who provided much background for this article); and his son, Connis O. Brown, III, an attorney in Ft. Lauderdale.