The Unfinished Opus of George Otis Coalson
Voices from the South Texas Archives, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

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President Duane M. Leech(I) and Dr. George Otis Coalson(r) admiring diplomas before graduation ceremonies. Faculty Staff photo, Texas A&M University-Kingsville Public Relations Collection, A1999-047.574, South Texas Archives, Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

South Texas State Teachers College, John E. Connie, Historical Conditions of South Texas, and the Teaching of History in Bilingual and Bicultural education.

Dr. Coalson's experience writing his Ph.D. thesis gave him an appreciation of oral histories. He participated in developing oral histories. For one oral history project Dr. Coalson wrote about George Coalson's expertise, "George's character and professionalism are absolutely beyond reproach. He knows more about South Texas than any other individual on faculty and the region."

Pat Allison has been doing research at the South Texas Archives for several years. If you want to learn more about South Texas Archives you can contact Pat Atkins at (361) 593-3775 or pat.allten@tamuk.edu.

The Open, 125 boxes of detailed note cards intended to be used for the Dictionary of South Texas. This picture was taken in the inner sanctum of the South Texas Archives by Matt Tallant, Processing Archivist, to be used for the George Otis Coalson Voices article, South Texas Archives, James C. Jernigan Library, Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Deceased, 125 boxes of data index cards filled with interesting tidbits of South Texas history and culture. These notes were started when Dr. Coalson was an undergraduate student at Texas A&M and were still being collected when he passed away in 1995. Dr. Coalson was born in Camp Wood, Real County, Texas. He graduated from Guadalupe High School in 1941. He served in the United States Army during World War II as a combat infantryman. He was married to a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, and fought at the Battle of the Bulge. After the war, George Coalson attended Texas College of Arts and Industries where he received his B.S. degree in history in 1949.

Deceased, George quickly achieved his master's degree in history in 1955. His dissertation thesis was titled American Labor Movement 1820-1897. It is a study of early labor organizations, the impact of labor into politics, and the labor changes caused by the mechanization of agriculture. For his Ph.D. work, he was done at the University of Oklahoma, where he received his Ph.D. in history in 1955.

Dr. Coalson's Ph.D. thesis is the Development of the Migrant Farm Labor in Texas. The first few points he put forth in 1955 are still relevant in the modern news. He emphasized the Immigration Law in 1917, when the United States government enacted it to be implemented in the English of Spanish and pay an unskilled and unskilled," "strangers generally charge a higher price than domestic labor. Even those who had migrated years earlier and settled permanently in rural areas were demanding higher wages than what was offered to migrant farm laborers.

As a member of the faculty, Dr. Coalson presented a speech based on this thesis. He talked about the difficulties faced by the migrant workers and the scarcity of studies about this labor group. "One would think that a labor system that at one time involved over 50,000 people would have attracted the attention of many scholars."

The sources available for Dr. Coalson's Ph.D. thesis depended largely on extensive interviews and were scarce. "The migrants themselves were usually uneducated and left few written accounts of their story."

After completing his Ph.D. thesis, it was time to return home to Kingsville and Texas A&M. Dr. Coalson began his teaching career at Texas A&M in 1955 as an instructor. He became a full professor in 1982. Dr. Coalson served as Chairman of the History Department from 1962 through 1978. He was elected president of the South Texas Historical Association in 1977. Dr. Coalson's list of published writings about history and university activities is long, and he proudly believes there was no one who knew more about Texas history than Dr. Coalson.

Dr. Coalson was deeply involved with the preparations of the Handbook of Texas. He wrote many of the articles that are still in the Handbook of Texas: Historical Conditions of South Texas, Transportation, Civil War, Texas State University, Transportation, Cities, Ballin Beach and McFaddens. These boxes of note cards represent over 45 dedicated years of study and research about South Texas. The Dictionary of South Texas was not completed. George Otis Coalson died June 4, 1995.

All of his detailed study was saved for researchers to use in the South Texas Archives. If you enjoyed learning about Dr. George Coalson and the George Otis Coalson Collection, please drop an email to Lori Atkins at lorri.atkins@tamuk.edu. The keepers of your history would like to hear from you. Check their web page at http://archivist.tamuk.edu.

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