



State & Local Records News

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Alabama Genealogical Society launches web index to loose records microfilm

By Jim Anderson, Alabama Genealogical Society

The Alabama Genealogical Society (AGS) is undertaking an ambitious project that will benefit researchers around the world. Its goal is to create a database of names compiled from court documents by volunteers of the "Loose Records Program," sponsored by the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) and the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU), and to publish it as a case-file index on the World Wide Web. The project is coordinated by four AGS members (Charles Harris, Melissa Hogan, Jyl Hardy, and Jim Anderson), with the support of ADAH. Additionally, 20 AGS volunteers have signed up for transcribing, proofreading, and other assignments.

In most counties, loose records volunteers compiled an index as they prepared and organized the case files in advance of the GSU filming team. Charles Harris, AGS publications committee chairman, notes a sense of urgency to make sure that someone in every county knows about the indexing project. Says Harris: "We are finding situations where an index was typed, printed, and filmed; but the computer file has now disappeared because the disks were erased, the hard drive crashed, or perhaps the computer was given away. Although we can accurately transcribe a print copy, doing so will slow a county's contribution getting added to the database. But regardless of the form a county's

index is in, we can handle conversion to our web index."

The technical aspects of the project are challenging. The initial draft web site (which can be browsed at www.lrp.algenscc.org) is using the transitional web page format to display alphabetized lists, but soon the volume of case names will make navigation unwieldy. (Jefferson County alone has more than 30,000 entries.) Work is under way to convert the collection to an on-line database system that will offer more options for advanced searching and permit faster retrieval. Not all the information for each entry will be displayed on the web, but the master database will retain the box and folder numbers where each document was filed.

Although researchers can find the microfilm rolls listed on the ADAH website or at www.FamilySearch.org, these listings currently show only the first and last case names filmed on each roll, leaving the reader to guess if a targeted name is within that range or was ever filmed at all. The AGS site offers an advantage to those who discover a name in the index, since each record has the specific roll identification code that can be used to borrow or buy the film.

To date, parts of four counties' loose records indexes are on-line: Calhoun, Cherokee, Clay, and Tallapoosa Counties. More names from these counties will be added; and indexes from

Barbour, Choctaw, Henry, Jefferson, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa Counties are on the way.

Editor's note: While the AGS indexing project is progressing, two more Alabama counties have finished filming their loose records. Houston County produced 31 rolls of estate files and marriages (1903-1941), while St. Clair County yielded 34 rolls of probate and circuit court files (1890-1950) from the Ashville and Pell City courthouses. These are our 44th and 45th counties to complete loose records projects. Early in August, filming got under way in Hale and Lawrence Counties.

State and Local Records Commissions approve RDAs

At its meeting on July 25, 2007, the **State Records Commission** approved a joint RDA for the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee, the Agricultural and Conservation Development Commission, and Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Districts. It also approved a new RDA for the Department of Finance's Division of Purchasing and revised RDAs for the Alabama Historical Commission, the Department of Transportation's Field Division, and the Secretary of State. Finally, the records commission reviewed annual RDA implementation reports from 30 state agencies,

Also meeting on July 25, the **Local Government Records Commission** approved revised RDAs for county commissions, county taxation agencies, and local law enforcement agencies.

The records commissions' next meetings will be held on **Wednesday, October 24, 2007**. The State Records Commission will convene at 10:00 a.m., and the Local Government Records Commission will begin at 1:30 p.m. Both meetings will be held in the Regions Board Room on the third floor of ADAH.

Records commission sets new requirements for documenting state agency meetings

To better address and define the scope and preservation of official records of formal meetings held by state government entities in Alabama, the State Records Commission issued the following additional guidelines at its quarterly meeting on July 25, 2007. The new requirements apply to all state agencies, colleges, and publicly-supported universities:

Formal meeting minutes that have been approved by the State Records Commission for permanent preservation must include meeting agendas, approved and signed minutes, and meeting packets as distributed by staff members of the agency/board/commission for review and/or action by the agency/board/commission during the meeting. Meeting packets may include, but are not limited to, any resolution, ordinance, petition, report, exhibit, and other related supporting documents that were discussed or adopted at a meeting. Meeting agendas and packets should always be attached to the minutes and become part of the official record.

Agencies should also reference the ADAH procedural leaflet "Guidelines for Taking Formal Meeting Minutes" (go to www.archives.state.al.us/officials/meetingminutesmay06.pdf) for appropriate procedures when taking meeting minutes.

If you have questions concerning the preservation of your agency's meeting minutes, please contact Tracey Berezansky (Assistant Director for Government Records) or Richard Wang (head of the State Government Records Section) at (334) 242-4452 or records@archives.alabama.gov.

County registrars may resume destroying non-voting records

On July 23, the Alabama Secretary of State's Office authorized county boards of registrars to resume destroying outdated "records not directly related to voter registration," in accordance with their RDA's requirements. Former Secretary of State Nancy Worley "froze" the destruction of all records held by boards of registrars in 2004, pending the implementation of Alabama's new voter registration system.

Although that system is still not fully implemented, the Secretary of State's Office expects that it will be within the next few months. Therefore, Secretary Chapman has agreed that administrative records that are not related to the voter registration process (for example, financial and personnel records) "may be disposed of in accordance with the [Local Government Records] Commission's requirements."

Once Alabama's voter registration system has met federal requirements under the Help America Vote Act, boards of registrars may also resume destroying outdated voter registration records. ADAH and the Secretary of State's Office will notify the boards when the time comes. We plan to issue an updated RDA soon afterward, as the current version dates from 2003.

The RDA for boards of registrars may be found on the ADAH website at www.archives.state.al.us/officials/rdas/local/registrarRDA.pdf. If your board has questions about which records may be legally destroyed, contact Tom Turley, Local Government Records Archivist, at (334)353-4607, or Tom.Turley@archives.alabama.gov.

ADAH website one of the best!

Family Tree Magazine has selected the ADAH website as one of its annual "101 best family history websites."

The magazine's September 2007 issue (available on newsstands since July 17) describes our site as follows:

"Your Alabama Civil War soldier awaits in a database here, along with online files of WWI servicemen, photos and 1867 voter rolls for a growing list of counties . . . The Local Government Records Microfilm Database will tell you where to look next."

A new feature of our award-winning website is the History Community Calendar (<http://www.archives.alabama.gov/adahcalendar.html>). It includes a form "that interested parties can use to notify us of events to be included on the calendar."

Congratulations to ADAH web guru Mark Palmer and everyone who helps to make our site a winner!

HRB surveys of users and repositories yield promising results

Since our last issue, the State Historical Records Advisory Board (HRB) has surveyed repositories of Alabama's historical records, as well as users of such records, in an effort to determine its plans and priorities for historical records preservation.

Both surveys, which were conducted primarily by e-mail, concluded on July 31. All 15 of the HRB's member organizations were contacted, along with other historical repositories. Forty-eight institutions responded, not including about 100 individual members of the Alabama Historical Association who replied on paper forms. Web responses to this survey can be seen at: <http://www.zoomerang.com/web/SharedResults/SharedResults>PasswordPage.aspx?ID=L22YRVKKG65ZB>.

The HRB received 557 on-line responses from researchers who use Alabama's historical records. Users were asked about the kinds of repositories they most frequently consulted (state, local, or university archives; local historical or genealogical societies; county record offices, etc.), as well as the subjects of their interest, the nature

and format of records they consulted, and their suggestions for improving the preservation and management of Alabama's historical records. Results of the user survey are available at: <http://www.zoomerang.com/web/SharedResults/SharedResultsPasswordPage.aspx?ID=L22YRW4MBS3J>.

Late in August, members of the HRB's planning committee will meet to discuss survey responses and determine how best to utilize them in developing a statewide plan. If, after reviewing the survey results on Zoomerang, readers of *State and Local Records News* would like to assist in this process by serving on a focus group, please contact the ADAH Government Records Division at (334)242-4452, or records@archives.alabama.gov.

Ask the archivist

Question: *Where can I get on-line assistance in creating a disaster plan?*

Archival and library collections are at risk from natural disasters—such as high winds, tornadoes, hurricanes, or flooding—and from accidents, building defects, or inappropriate environmental systems. Collections are particularly vulnerable during renovation or construction projects. A disaster plan that addresses both prevention and disaster response and recovery can reduce the risk of disasters and minimize losses if they occur.

Doing the necessary research, surveying the building and the collections, and writing the plan deters a lot of people from creating a disaster plan. The Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, MA, and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners in Boston, have developed **dPlan**, a free on-line disaster planning tool that helps to simplify the process.

dPlan is best suited to small and medium-sized institutions. It enables one to enter data to an on-line, fill-in-the-blank template to create and print a customized disaster plan. The plan is avail-

able at www.dplan.org. At this site, it is possible to run through a demo, register as a new user, and enter information. dPlan is available in both Microsoft Word and PDF. While the 127-page plan requires extensive data entry, it saves an agency from having to develop a disaster plan from scratch. dPlan includes institutional information; disaster prevention, response, and recovery data; supplies and services; and staff training. Agencies can also review and update their disaster plans.

Once an agency develops a disaster planning and recovery document, another useful tool is the **pocket response plan** (PReP), which is available from the Council of State Archives (CoSA) at www.statearchivists.org. A template for PReP enables one to enter the names and telephone numbers of the primary agency contacts; first responders (police, fire department, and emergency management); the disaster recovery team; utilities, emergency services providers (document recovery services, data recovery services, and freezer space); mutual aid partners (staff from other institutions and volunteers); regional preservation services; and other useful contacts. The plan, which is easy to update, folds into a Tyvek pocket. This pocket can be carried in a wallet or purse, so that it is readily available. It can be purchased from CoSA for a small fee.

For more information on this and other records conservation issues, contact Linda Overman, ADAH preservation officer, at (334)353-4726, or Linda.Overman@archives.alabama.gov.