



State & Local Records News

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Alabama's local historical programs more numerous than ever

The proliferation of local preservation programs across Alabama since the 1970s may be attributed in part to widespread public interest in the Civil War Centennial, followed by the enormous popularity of Alex Haley's *Roots*. In the following decades, Alabamians increasingly occupied themselves in tracing family connections, looking up ancestors' military service records, and collecting artifacts. They sought better access to historical records in courthouses and city halls and worked to establish collections of local history and genealogy in public libraries.

At the same time, federal and state authorities were also becoming more concerned with local records preservation. Under a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), Alabama completed a statewide needs assessment report in 1985. It concluded that the condition of county and municipal records was "deplorable." By the late 1980s, ADAH had responded by establishing records retention schedules for local governments and (assisted by the Genealogical Society of Utah [GSU], the National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH]), and the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama Newspapers [CPAN]) building a centralized microfilm collection of historical local records and newspapers.

ADAH also began helping localities to develop their own archives, a process already under way. Blount County's archives (1977) is the oldest in the state; other early ventures include the Limestone County Archives (1980), Mobile Municipal Archives

(1983), Birmingham Public Library Archives and Manuscripts Department (1987), and Mobile Probate Court Archives (1989). By the 1990s, representatives from these and other institutions were meeting regularly with ADAH archivists in a "Local Archives Roundtable."

Meanwhile, the U.S. Bicentennial had provided an impetus for developing "living history" sites at Mobile's Fort Condé (1976) and Huntsville's Constitution Village (1982), although the Montgomery Landmarks Association had operated Old Alabama Town since 1967. Elsewhere, museums arose from a desire to honor local or historical figures of historical or literary merit, such as Helen Keller (Tuscumbia's Ivy Green, 1952) and Harper Lee (Monroeville's Old Courthouse Museum, 1963). Over the past 50 years, local historical societies, genealogical societies, and landmark groups have established a variety of depot museums, local history museums, archives, and historic sites across Alabama.

ADAH assistance efforts were augmented in the 1990s by a \$300,000 NHPRC grant, plus a matching appropriation of \$100,000 from the legislature. During this first phase of its regrant program, Alabama's Historical Records Advisory Board (HRAB) awarded records preservation grants to 37 counties or municipalities, many of which used their awards to develop archives or local records programs.

Beginning in 1999, a "loose records" program jointly conducted by the ADAH and GSU brought county officials together with volunteers from local historical and genealogical societies to collect, pre-

pare, and microfilm (later digitize) unbound estate files, marriages, divorces, and other records of historical and genealogical importance. So far, 54 of Alabama's 67 counties have completed loose records projects. Many have gone on to undertake other records preservation efforts, such as county archives.

Lack of money remains the greatest obstacle to records preservation. Although some local preservation programs receive support from filing fees or periodic appropriations from county or municipal governing bodies, most still depend largely on donations from their volunteers or grants. Since 2009, the HRAB has once more been able to offer NHPRC-supported regrants, albeit at a much lower level (\$50,000 statewide for each cycle) than in the 1990s. Forty-five local repositories have obtained small grants for records preservation projects. Unhappily, the recent halving of NHPRC's budget, with more cuts to come, threatens the survival of this program.

Even so, Alabama's local records preservation programs continue to progress. Earlier in this millennium, ADAH archivists were in regular contact with some 20 local archives or historical museums. The latest tally (compiled in March) is 42, with more in the early stages of development. While this increase results partly from state and federal assistance to localities, more credit belongs to the hundreds of volunteers who devote countless hours to preserving local records, and to the dedicated county or municipal officials who support them insofar as their own resources permit.

For an updated list of Alabama's local archives and historical museums, visit the ADAH website: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/officials/LocalArchivesandmuseums2012.pdf>.

Several Alabama localities starting new archival programs

During recent months, ADAH local records staff has cooperated with several counties and municipalities on developing archival programs.

In February, archivists Christine Garrett and Tom Turley visited the **City of Prichard** (Mobile County), where former ADAH staff member Frazine Taylor has been advising city officials on plans to convert the former (ca. 1936) Prichard City Hall into a combined archives, museum, and civic center. Also



Prichard's former city hall and future archives

housed in the building will be the Prichard Sports and Leadership Hall of Fame, focusing on well-known athletes from the city.

Supporting Mayor Davis in this initiative is a citizens' committee led by Ms. Ossia Edwards. Her group has already amassed an interesting collection of old documents and photographs, one of which (a view of downtown Prichard ca. 1958) was recently featured in an historical calendar highlighting Mobile County's bicentennial. After the building has been renovated (and considerable renovation work will be required), old municipal records will be gathered from several current storage areas, and items of historical importance will be moved into the archives.

In mid-March, after stopping by the **Marshall County Archives** (featured in the September 2008 issue of *State and Local Records News*), Tom visited two more new archival programs. The **DeKalb County Genealogical Society**, which has continued its original probate loose records project by preparing

old circuit court files to be digitized by FamilySearch (formerly the GSU), is also renovating the old county health department for use as an archives. As noted in our January issue, the society received a HRAB regrant during the 2010 cycle, enabling it to remove more files from a snake-infested warehouse and store them on archival shelving in a controlled environment. Once circuit clerk Pam Simpson retrieves additional court files from Montgomery, they will all reside in the new archives, along with records from other county offices. Though the facility is not yet fully outfitted, project coordinator Lana Floyd hopes that DeKalb County's archives can open to the public before year's end.



Future home of the DeKalb County Archives

Tom's last stop on March 13 was the **City of Florence**, where he met with Libby Jordan of the tourism board to inspect two candidate facilities for a city, or city-county, archives: the old public library and a suite of law offices located in a former bank building. Due to environmental problems at the library, the law offices appeared to be the better possibility. However, city officials are also evaluating other sites, including space in the new library. They have requested an inventory of all city and county offices, in order to determine the volume of records that require archival storage. Plans for a Florence or Lauderdale County archives have been percolating for some years, but local officials now seem ready to allocate funding for the project.

These and other developing archival programs can apply for a new round of HRAB re grants in 2013, assuming that our program remains funded. *State and Local Records News* will keep readers apprised

of these prospects, and of the ongoing progress of Alabama counties and municipalities in preserving their historical records.

Records commissions approve new, revised RDAs

Meeting on April 25, the **State Records Commission** approved new records disposition authorities (RDAs) for the Alabama School of Fine Arts and the 17th Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office (covering Greene, Marengo, and Sumter Counties). It approved revised RDAs for the Alabama Departments of Archives and History, Human Resources, and Post-secondary Education; the Alabama Fire College; and the Board for Registered Interior Designers.

Because it did not meet in January, the SRC reviewed annual reports on RDA implementation for both January and April. For January, 22 of 35 state agencies whose reports were due reported, along with 21 of 26 public colleges and 5 of 13 public universities. For April, 30 of 39 state agencies submitted their reports.

Also meeting on April 25, the **Local Government Records Commission** approved revised RDAs for county probate offices, local boards of education, and municipalities. It also reviewed a summary of annual RDA implementation reports from Alabama health care authorities. Twenty-one of 35 HCAs reported destroying a total of 8,608 cubic feet of outdated health care records in 2011.

Records commission welcomes new agency representatives

Governor Robert Bentley has appointed four new local representatives to the Local Government Records Commission. They attended their first meeting on April 25.

Newly appointed county commission representatives are Marshall County's James Hutcherson and Winston County's Roger Hayes. They replaced

Ed Bishop of Baldwin County and Mike Dean of Mobile County. Two new city clerks, Gina Antolini (Columbiana) and Martha Cato (Valley) replaced Iva Nelson (Gadsden) and Pam Morse (West Blocton).

Another new member was James Hall, who succeeded Linda Barrontine (who recently retired) as the Examiners of Public Accounts' representative on the commission.

We thank departing members for their support of the LGRC and welcome our new members as they begin work. For complete lists of State and Local Government Records Commission members, see the ADAH website at: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/officials/members1.html> and <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/officials/locmembers1.html>.

Records commissions approve 2012 annual awards

At their meetings on April 25, the State and Local Government Records Commissions selected the recipients of their 2012 awards for exemplary records management and preservation.

The State Records Commission recognized the **Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM)**, while the Local Government Records Commission honored the **Coosa County Probate Office** and the **Madison County Records Center**.

Because the awards will be presented at the commissions' next meetings, *State and Local Records News* will reserve more information on the recipients' accomplishments for our next issue.

Shelby County Historical Society receives Kuykendall Award

Another honor has come to a previous (2010) Local Government Records Commission award recipient, the Shelby County Historical Society. On April 13, SCHS president Bobby Joe Seales accepted the 2012

James Ray Kuykendall Historical Society Award, presented by the Alabama Historical Association.

Given biannually since 1979, this award recognizes "significant contributions to a greater appreciation of community and state history." Past winners are listed on the AHA website at: <http://www.archives.state.al.us/aha/localawd2001.htm>.

The SCHS, which operates the Shelby County Museum and Archives, was recognized at the AHA's annual meeting in Huntsville. ADAH adds its congratulations to all the members of this outstanding historical association.



Bobby Joe Seales with the Kuykendall Award

Chris Davidson appointed state archivist of Georgia

Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp announced in mid-April that former ADAH archivist Chris Davidson had been appointed as Director of the Georgia Department of Archives and History. Mr. Davidson, who had

most recently served as the Alabama Department of Transportation's records officer, took up his new duties on May 2.

Chris Davidson began his career at ADAH in 1994, as a student assistant at our records center. In 1996, he joined the Government Records Division as a state records archivist, where he coordinated a three-year project to develop the RDA for public universities. In 2001, he was selected to manage the State Records Center, before becoming the Department of Transportation's records officer in 2005.



New Georgia state archivist Chris Davidson

At the DOT, Mr. Davidson developed agency-wide records management policies and procedures, provided records management training to his staff, inventoried records at department headquarters and divisions all across the state, renovated an agency building as an archives and records center, and supervised the digitization of department records. For these accomplishments, the DOT received the State Records Commission's 2009 annual award.

Although his former colleagues at ADAH will miss working with Chris Davidson, we congratulate him on his new position and look forward to maintaining a close relationship as he leads our neighbor state's fine archives.

Dr. Marty Olliff chosen to head Alabama Historical Association

At its annual meeting held recently in Huntsville, the Alabama Historical Association elected Dr. Martin Olliff as its incoming president for 2012-2013. Dr. Olliff, who heads the Wiregrass Archives at Troy University-Dothan, now will also lead the oldest statewide historical organization in Alabama.

ADAH staff has cooperated frequently with Dr. Olliff on records issues. He has participated in ADAH seminars for state and local agencies, and the Wiregrass Archives hosted an application training workshop for the first HRAB regrant cycle. He also advises and assists local record-holding entities in the Wiregrass area, such as the Henry County Probate Office, the Henry County Historical Society, and the Wiregrass Museum of Art in Dothan.

We congratulate Marty Olliff on his AHA presidency and look forward to working with him in this capacity as well.

PeDALS project continues despite end of grant support

The Library of Congress grant for the Persistent Digital Archives and Library Systems (PeDALS) project, which ADAH joined in the fall of 2009, ended on December 31, 2011.

PeDALS' goals were to develop a curatorial rationale to support an automated, integrated workflow to process collections of digital records and an inexpensive storage network that can preserve the authenticity and integrity of digital collections. Additionally, the project aimed to build a community of archives and libraries to share practices, tools, tips, and other advice in working with electronic records.

The seven state archives and libraries involved in the project had varying degrees of success in implementing the PeDALS system for their agencies. Some states were able to ingest many records series;

others have yet to ingest any. ADAH falls into the latter category but plans to begin ingesting series within the next few months. Hardware difficulties, software glitches, and time constraints prevented ingestion from occurring earlier.

Despite our technological issues, ADAH remains committed to the goals of PeDALS. When compared to other systems available today, PeDALS is one of the most affordable, promising systems for success. ADAH; the Arizona Library, Archives, and State Records; and the Wisconsin Historical Society have agreed to continue working on the project. Goals established during the grant remain the same. Each state contributes money to support a programmer's position to help with code development. Once a month, the states meet by conference call for a status update, and IT personnel consult bi-weekly to discuss technical issues.

As a result of participating in this project, ADAH Government Records staff became more focused and knowledgeable on electronic records. Staff developed new forms for transferring permanent records to ADAH and began updating leaflets on electronic records issues. GRD staff has begun to incorporate electronic records management into records training provided to state and local agencies.

For more information on PeDALS, contact GRD archivist Christine Garrett at: christine.garrett@archives.alabama.gov.

ADAH to begin collecting newspapers electronically

Since ADAH opened in 1901, it has collected and preserved copies of newspapers from across the state. A listing of bound newspapers available in our collection is available at: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/news/hard/search.cfm>.

In addition, ADAH is the repository of record for all newspaper microfilm created under the Coalition for the Preservation of Alabama Newspapers in the 1980s and early 1990s. A complete listing of

available newspaper microfilm can be found at <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/newsmicro/search.cfm>.

Currently, ADAH wants to continue its long-standing newspaper preservation program by instituting a new process for collecting copies of Alabama newspapers for research use and preservation. This new process involves collecting the electronic files from which newspapers are printed. The goals of the program are:

- To acquire a copy of each edition of a participating newspaper through uploading by the publisher or newspaper staff to ADAH, via Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) or a similar file transfer program or process.
- To allow ADAH patrons in-house access to the electronic newspaper versions in the Research Room of the Department of Archives and History. Patrons may research the newspapers and take a copy (paper or electronic) of an article, or item in an article, for their personal research use.
- To create and maintain an archival file of each electronic copy of the newspaper for historical preservation.

ADAH is currently contacting publishers of Alabama newspapers to request their cooperation in this project. For more information, contact Tracey Berezansky, Assistant Director for Government Records, at (334)242-4452, or tracey.berezansky@archives.alabama.gov.