



# State & Local Records News

Vol. 9, No. 3  
November 2004

*Published by the ADAH Government Records Division*

## Loose records microfilming under way in Jefferson County

After 3½ years of preparation work by local volunteers, microfilming of Jefferson County's tremendous volume of loose records at last got under way in late September. New GSU camera operator Eric Olsen began filming marriage licenses from 1818 to 1950 and estate case files from 1818 to 1915. All records in this initial phase of filming are from the Birmingham courthouse.

Meanwhile, project coordinator Jeri Corbitt and volunteers from the Birmingham Genealogical Society are almost finished preparing estate files from 1916 to 1936. So far, Jefferson County's project amounts to an estimated 1.9 million microfilm images and is expected to take 3-5 years to complete. This total includes Birmingham school census records, but it does not include local church records and African-American family histories that are also earmarked to be filmed. Recently, genealogical society volunteers inventoried 2,500 estate files in the Bessemer courthouse (1916-1936) that may also be included in the project.

Although Mobile County is also finishing a huge records microfilming project (with over 400 rolls produced so far), Jefferson County's seems likely to become the largest in the state. In all, 29 Alabama counties have completed loose records microfilming to this point, with Russell and Montgomery Counties the most recently completed.

Along with Jefferson, filming is now under way in Crenshaw, Lee, and Marshall Counties.

Since it began in 1999, the loose records program (a cooperative endeavor of ADAH, the Genealogical Society of Utah, county officials, and local volunteers) has produced nearly 3,000 rolls—or 5 million images—of Alabama county records microfilm. For more about the program, including information on where your county stands, contact the ADAH Government Records Division at (334) 242-4452 or [records@archives.alabama.gov](mailto:records@archives.alabama.gov).

## Records commissions approve new, revised RDAs

At their meeting on October 27, **State Records Commission** members approved a new records disposition authority (RDA) for the Governor's Office of Faith-based Initiatives. They also approved RDA revisions for the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Youth Services.

Also meeting on October 27, **the Local Government Records Commission** approved revisions of the RDAs for county taxation agencies and local boards of education.

The commissions' next quarterly meetings are scheduled for **Wednesday, January 26, 2005**. The State Records Commission will begin at 10:00

a.m., and the Local Government Records Commission at 1:30 p.m. Both meetings will be held in the Milo B. Howard Auditorium at ADAH.

## **Long-time member retires from records commission**

**T**he Local Government Records Commission's latest meeting was the last for one of its longest-serving members. Bill Joseph, who retired in November after 40 years as chairman of the Montgomery County Commission, also resigned his place on the records commission, where he had served since 1988.

At the meeting on October 27, LGRC chairman Dr. Edwin Bridges presented Mr. Joseph with a certificate of appreciation from Governor Bob Riley, which noted that "all citizens of Alabama counties and municipalities have benefited" from his 16 years of service in "promoting the management and preservation of their public records."

Staff of the ADAH Government Records Division also wish to thank Mr. Joseph for his work on the commission and to wish him well as he enjoys his retirement.

## **ADAH begins RDA development project for 911 districts**

**I**n their first appraisal project for unscheduled local government records in several years, archivists Frank Brown and Tom Turley met in October with state and local 911 officials to start work on a records disposition authority (RDA) for local 911 districts. Also attending the meeting were Art Faulkner of the state Department of Homeland Security and the directors of three Alabama 911 districts.

Many 911 records (such as dispatch logs, audiotapes, and emergency vehicle run reports) are already scheduled in the RDAs for county commissions and municipalities. However, because 911 districts may be under county, municipal, or

independent jurisdiction and may include various combinations of emergency services (fire, police, ambulance, etc.), the agencies' statewide organization has requested a separate RDA for them.

The RDA development project will include on-site visits to several 911 districts. After 911 staff assist ADAH archivists in identifying agency functions and appraising records, the new RDA will be presented to the Local Government Records Commission in April or July 2005.

## **RDA reporting process for state universities reviewed**

**O**n November 17, representatives from nine state public universities met at ADAH with Government Records Division director Tracey Berezansky and state records archivist Chris Davidson, in order to reexamine the RDA for public universities.

Besides a review of existing records retention requirements, the meeting resulted in several proposed changes to the RDA and the annual reporting form. These changes will be evaluated by staff from all Alabama public universities, and a final version of the RDA and reporting form will be submitted to the State Records Commission at a future meeting.

Public universities that did not send representatives to the meeting can still comment on the proposed revisions. For more information, contact Chris Davidson at (334)242-4306, or send e-mail to [records@archives.alabama.gov](mailto:records@archives.alabama.gov).

## **Preserving Alabama's local newspapers**

**O**ne of the under-publicized activities at ADAH is the preservation of many of Alabama's local newspapers through microfilming. Since the late 1880s, the wood-pulp paper used to create newspapers has caused them to yellow and turn brittle very rapidly.

In an effort to preserve the crumbling historical newspapers in Alabama and across the United States, the US Newspaper Microfilming Project began in the 1980s. At one point during the project, over 20 Alabama institutions participated in preserving historical newspapers from around the state. Since the end of the US Newspaper Project in the early 1990s, the number of institutions continuing to microfilm Alabama's newspapers has dwindled to one.

The ADAH's commitment to newspaper preservation continues, with two staff members assigned to microfilming responsibilities. Annually, we microfilm over 95 Alabama newspapers. This film is available for research use in the department's reference room or may be borrowed through the Interlibrary Loan system at your local library. Because of the need to microfilm complete runs of a newspaper, it may take several months for the latest issues to become available.

Thanks for this cooperative preservation effort also belong to the newspaper owners across the state. They provide complimentary newspaper subscriptions to ADAH to support the microfilming program. Without their assistance, the program could not continue.

For a complete list of newspaper titles available on microfilm, visit the ADAH website at [www.archives.state.al.us/newsmicro/search.cfm](http://www.archives.state.al.us/newsmicro/search.cfm), or call our reference room at (334)242-4435, ext. 251.

## Private records from ADAH collection to be microfilmed

Since their arrival in July, Rod and RaNae Richards, GSU camera operators assigned to film items from the ADAH collection, have completed over 100 rolls of county records microfilm. As another part of their assignment, the Richards will also film some 55,000 exposures of private records held by ADAH. These materials were inventoried by our previous GSU couple, Richard and Lorraine Jenkins.

Among the records to be filmed are private genealogical collections pertaining to the families of Confederate General Joseph Wheeler, Senators Howell and Thomas Heflin, and the founder of our archives, Thomas Owen. In addition, the GSU will also film a large number of church, cemetery, and family Bible records in the ADAH collection.

Needless to say, microfilm of these collections will soon be available for research in the ADAH reference room. For more detailed information on items to be filmed, contact Tom Turley at (334)242-4452, ext. 234, or [Tom.Turley@archives.alabama.gov](mailto:Tom.Turley@archives.alabama.gov).

## Ask the Archivist

**Question:** *What are the best methods of caring for family papers, scrapbooks, and photographs?*

Wood pulp and chemicals, used in paper manufacturing since the 1880s, contain acids that cause paper to turn yellow, become brittle, and eventually crumble. With photographs, the emulsion (the gelatin, image-bearing layer) is especially susceptible to damage. Other factors affecting the longevity of paper, bookbindings, and photographs are temperature, humidity, exposure to light, pollution, dust, mildew, insect damage, and simple wear and tear. By improving the storage environment, using appropriate containers, and practicing good housekeeping, we can slow the deterioration of paper, books, and photographs.

**Storage environment.** Optimum storage conditions include a temperature of 70 degrees F., plus or minus 5 degrees, and a relative humidity of 55%, with a variation of no more than 10%. Consistency is important, because fluctuations in humidity and temperature cause paper and photographs to expand and contract, eventually breaking them down.

From spring to fall, the best method of maintaining a constant environment is air-conditioning. If air-conditioning is not feasible, fans and

dehumidifiers offer an inexpensive, though less effective, alternative. Avoid storing family papers or photographs in attics and outbuildings. If renting a storage unit, be sure it is environmentally controlled. Inspect the unit and your collection periodically to note any moisture or insect problems.

**Storage containers.** Papers, books, and photographs are susceptible to acids in wooden containers, file folders, and cardboard. Avoid most plastic and acrylic containers, due to chemical reactions. Acceptable plastics include archival-quality Mylar, polyethylene, and polypropylene. Do not use pressure-sensitive tape or adhesives (which can stain) to mend torn papers or photographs. Instead, sleeve items in acceptable plastic or use neutral PH adhesives. Be judicious in using archival tape.

Preserving photograph albums and scrapbooks is also problematic. Avoid books with acidic or adhesive pages. Use neutral PH adhesives and photo corners to mount materials. Black-and-white photographs have a longer life than color ones, which fade over time, even when stored in the dark. When framing photographs, use acid-free or museum-quality mat board and a window mat to keep photographs away from the glass. Identify photographs on the back, using a soft lead pencil or a print and film marking pen (available from archival suppliers).

**Cleaning books.** Keep the tops of books clean. A vacuum cleaner with a round dusting brush can be used to clean them while they are on the shelves. Fragile books should not be vacuumed, since pieces of pages can be pulled loose.

Hand-dust books periodically. Grasp each book firmly and tip it forward so the spine is facing up and the top edge down. Hold the book tightly closed to prevent dust from being pushed down into the paper. Use a soft-bristled brush to remove dust. If the book is still dusty, use a treated cloth (such as a One-Wipe, available at grocery and discount stores) to clean its edges and cover.

For more information on this and other records conservation issues, contact ADAH con-

servation officer Linda Overman at (334)242-4452, ext. 229, or [Linda.Overman@archives.alabama.gov](mailto:Linda.Overman@archives.alabama.gov). A series of conservation leaflets is available on the ADAH website at [www.archives.state.al.us/leaflets1.html/#conservation](http://www.archives.state.al.us/leaflets1.html/#conservation).