



# State & Local Records News

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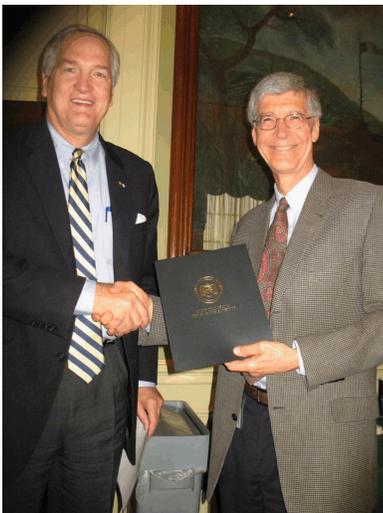
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## State and Local Government Records Commissions Present Annual Awards

At the State Records Commission meeting on April 27, 2011, SRC chairman and ADAH director Dr. Ed Bridges presented Attorney General Luther Strange with the commission's annual award in records management and preservation.

The archival/records management function of the Attorney General's Office is administered by its Administrative Services Division. This division



*AG Strange and Dr. Bridges*

employs two full-time staff members for records management and document preservation. Two additional employees assist part-time with records-related activities. The agency began to implement an automated case management system in 1998 by utilizing the Prolaw application. As part of this process, the AG's office regularly scans and electronically stores a large portion of its documents. Paper copies of records are stored at the State Records Center, and at the agency's own facility, to meet RDA retention requirements prior to destruction or transmittal to ADAH. The automated operation increases the safety of records, improves the tracking and retrieval

time of records, and reduces office space needed to store paper records. Records management staff work with each agency division to ensure that records-related issues are addressed as efficiently and accurately as possible. The agency's RDA is periodically reviewed by AG staff for any needed revisions due to changes in office procedure or state and federal law.

In accepting the award, Attorney General Strange lauded the outstanding work of staff member Melisa Martin in supervising the records program's day-to-day operations. ADAH commends the Attorney General's office for its commitment to records management and preservation.

Although the Local Government Records Commission did not meet on April 27, Dr. Bridges invited its two awardees for 2010 to receive their certificates at the State Records Commission meeting. Caroline Horton accepted the LGRC's first award, which went to the **Alabama Genealogical Society**.

ADAH Government Records Division staff made this nomination. In 2006, members of the AGS publications committee, some of whom were involved with Jefferson County's loose records micro-filming project, "suggested that the [project's] index might be merged with similar indexes from other Alabama counties and placed on the web." Jefferson County's former coordinator, Jeri Corbitt, began contacting other projects; and Jim Anderson (assisted by Jyl Hardy, Charlie Harris, Melissa Hogan, and other AGS members) took the lead in developing a statewide database of loose records information. It is

available online at: <http://lrp.algensoc.org/lrpw/loader.html>. “By the end of 2010 . . . 23 counties [were] represented with over 56,000 records in the database.” That total includes about half of Alabama’s loose records projects completed so far, but the AGS will “continue seeking county indexes and arranging for transcribers to create an index if a computer file version was lost or not available.”

By creating a unified, consistent database of loose records project indexes, the AGS web project has greatly facilitated public access to historical estate files, marriages, divorces, Confederate pension files, and other Alabama county records of enormous research value. We are grateful to Jim Anderson and his committee for their fine work.

The second LGRC award recipient was the



*Ms. Caroline Horton accepts the Alabama Genealogical Society’s award from Dr. Ed Bridges*

**Baldwin County Department of Archives and History.** Founded in 2005, the archives department “has properly cataloged and stored over 5,000 collections in the past five years,” according to archivist John Jackson. Currently, its collections occupy about 80% of the archives’ 8,500-cubic-foot storage capacity. Besides providing climate-controlled storage for Baldwin County’s archival records, the staff of four oversees a county-wide records management and disposition program.

Among other accomplishments Mr. Jackson cites are transferring, cleaning, and processing over 40,000 circuit court case files and “several thousand” tax abstracts; collecting rare 19<sup>th</sup>-century court rec-

ords pertaining to Fort Mims; and instituting “an electronic online catalog to ensure availability and efficient retrieval for our patrons.” In addition, the archives is actively involved in many other Baldwin County historical initiatives, including a flag conservation project (nominated for a 2009 LGRC award) and a new historical attraction, Bicentennial Park. Mr. Jackson lauds the “teamwork” of his staff in allowing the archives “to overcome all obstacles [and] meet all deadlines and . . . expectations placed on us by the Baldwin County Commission.”



*Mr. Dorsey and Mr. Jackson receive the Baldwin County Archives’ award*

One Baldwin County’s commissioner, Taylor Dorsey, joined Mr. Jackson in accepting the award from Dr. Bridges. We congratulate Baldwin County on its excellent archival program.

## State Records Commission approves new, revised RDAs

Meeting in the ADAH Building on April 27, 2011, the **State Records Commission** approved revised records disposition authorities (RDAs) for the following state government agencies: Board of Medical Scholarship Awards, Department of Mental Health, Department of Revenue, Office of the Secretary of State, and Department of Transportation. The commission also reviewed annual RDA implementation reports from 39 state agencies.

Because it was unable to attain a quorum, the **Local Government Records Commission** did not convene on April 27. Items on the agenda for that meeting will be held over for July.

The State and Local Government Records Commissions' next meetings will take place on **Wednesday, July 27, 2011**, in the Regions Board Room at ADAH, beginning at 10:00 and 11:00 a.m., respectively.

## State records liaison training workshop held at ADAH

On April 29, 2011, ADAH Government Records Division (GRD) staff hosted the division's first statewide records management training workshop for records liaisons of state agencies, community colleges, and publicly-supported universities. A total of 53 records liaisons, representing entities across the state, attended the four-hour training session, held in the Joseph M. Farley Alabama Power Auditorium at ADAH.

Dr. Ed Bridges, ADAH director, started the program with an introductory presentation on the history of archives and records management. Next, Tracey Berezansky, Assistant Director for Government Records, provided an overview of state public records laws, the roles of State Records Commission and ADAH, and the Government Records Division's work with state agency records liaisons. State rec-



*GRD director Tracey Berezansky speaks to state agency records liaisons*

ords section head Richard Wang described the work of developing state agency RDAs and training agency staff to implement them and submit annual RDA implementation reports.

Later sessions focused on preserving and transmitting agency records; accessioning, arranging, and describing records after they arrive at ADAH; utilizing electronic record-keeping systems, e-mail, and other alternative formats; and preserving state agency publications and websites. Archivists Alden Monroe, Christine Garrett, and Mike Breedlove provided instruction on these topics. Alden also demonstrated the department's online search and reference system, known as ADAHCAT.



*Alden Monroe shows workshop participants the records storage vault at ADAH*

The day ended with a tour of the Archives' climate-controlled records storage area for workshop attendees, led by GRD staff.

To build on the success of this initial workshop, the Government Records Division plans to hold similar training sessions on a regular basis in the future. Staff will also continue to train individual agencies on site. For information on these and other training opportunities, contact Richard Wang at (334) 353-4605 or [Richard.Wang@archives.alabama.gov](mailto:Richard.Wang@archives.alabama.gov).

## Alabama local records generally ride out the storm

In the wake of the tornadoes that devastated much of Alabama on April 27, Government Records Division archivists began contacting counties and municipalities about loss or damage to their records. Understandably, in view of the terrible destruction of lives and property inflicted by these storms, records could not be the



*Tornado damage at the Cullman County Courthouse*

first priority for many local governments. It was extremely fortunate, therefore, that the tornadoes spared all but a few courthouses and city halls in the affected counties. Where damage did occur, local officials were able to launch recovery measures promptly and usually prevent the loss of essential record information.

Despite widespread devastation to downtown areas in many Alabama towns and cities, it appears that Cullman County's was the only courthouse to be damaged. One side of its roof was blown away, and third-floor circuit court offices and courtrooms were still closed when GRD archivists Christine Garrett and Tom Turley visited on May 6. However, records in county offices on lower floors remained undamaged. An archives in the courthouse basement (housing historical records from the probate office) had paint peeled from walls beneath its windows by the wind; but because the tornado produced very little rain, the records remained dry. Although the damage to downtown Cullman was extensive, the tornado took a fairly narrow path and missed the city hall.

City halls in general seem to have fared well, at least so far as records are concerned. Hanceville (Cullman County); Hackleburg and Phil Campbell (Franklin County); Fultondale and Gardendale (Jefferson County); Ashville, Odenville, and Ragland (St. Clair County); and Cordova (Walker County) all reported little or no destruction of records, despite widespread damage to their city centers and, in some cases, city halls. In an amazing number of cases, municipal records were fortuitously housed in parts of the buildings not impacted by the storms.

Not everybody's records went unscathed. On their way to Cullman on May 6, Tom and Christine visited the Town of Riverside in St. Clair County, where damage to the town hall's roof resulted in records in the attic getting wet. Happily, town clerk Rhonda Burns already had the situation well in hand. A disaster recovery vendor, Servpro out of Anniston, had several high-powered fans running in the attic and had pulled the wettest boxes and loose records, placing them around the room strategically to air-dry.



*Records recovery measures in the Town of Riverside*

Ms. Burns—who has been the clerk in Riverside since 1994—had already secured her town’s permanent records (minutes, ordinances, and maps) in a concrete, ground-floor vault, so they were protected from the wind and rain. Records in the attic storage room were all short-term (traffic tickets, routine financial records), except for building permits and inspections with a 13-year retention period. These temporary records had been neatly arranged on archival-quality, steel shelving (provided by the town council) and were clearly labeled, so that disposable material could be easily identified. Thanks to Ms. Burns’ foresight and Servpro’s prompt recovery measures, Riverside seems likely to emerge from the tornado with no loss of essential record information.

Other Alabama public structures were less fortunate. According to the Department of Education, 18 schools across the state sustained heavy damage, and at least five schools (three in Tuscaloosa and two in Hackleburg) were totally destroyed. The Alabama Public Library Service reported that six public libraries (in Birmingham, Cordova, Jasper, Killen, Pell City, and Ragland) were severely damaged. ADAH staff has not yet assessed the status of these libraries’ historical collections; but local museums and archives in tornado-stricken counties reported no damage to their records or collections.

## Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society perseveres with records work

One historical entity that was hardly slowed by last month’s weather is the Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society, whose Night Group has been actively involved for several years in a project to preserve, catalog, and (lately) digitally photograph early circuit court volumes from the county courthouse. The project’s quarters—located in an office building just off McFarland and University Boulevards—took a “near miss” from the tornado that blew out windows next door at DCH Medical Center and devastated nearby neighborhoods and businesses in Tuscaloosa. Nevertheless, on May 4 TGS volunteers took time out from disaster relief work in their city to meet with GRD archivists Tracey Berezansky, Christine Garrett, and Tom Turley and bring us up to date about their records project.

The volunteers have nearly finished cleaning, cataloging, and indexing 446 historical circuit court volumes, the earliest dating from 1822. Index information from these records will become part of the Tuscaloosa Public Library’s online catalog and (along with the index from Tuscaloosa County’s earlier loose records project) will be incorporated into the Alabama Genealogical Society’s statewide loose records database (see page 1).

The project’s latest effort (partly funded by a 2010 grant from Alabama’s Historical Records Advisory Board) is to digitally photograph the old court volumes for publication on the TGS website: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~alngtgs/7thfloor.htm>. In preparation for this work, three volunteers visited a similar project in Southampton, Virginia for advice. The HRAB’s award provided money for one Canon camera; TGS member donations allowed another to be purchased. During our visit on May 4, the project’s computer expert, Tony Fretwell, showed us his new camera set-up. The TGS Night Group will digitize a substantial number of old court volumes by the time its grant ends in September.

We applaud the TGS and other local volunteers, who persevere in their historical and genealogical endeavors despite little or no funding, other demands upon their time, and—every now and then—natural disasters.



*Tony Fretwell preparing digital cameras for photographing historical Tuscaloosa circuit court volumes*

## Sources of disaster recovery assistance available on ADAH website

After the tornados on April 27, GRD staff updated our list of disaster recovery and other archival and records management vendors. The new list highlights sources of assistance in or close to Alabama, but it also includes nationally-known vendors outside our area.

Vendors on the list offer various disaster-recovery or records management services, including: freeze-drying and other emergency repair of fire- or water-damaged records, general records conservation work, recovery of electronic records and other alternative storage media, dehumidification of records storage areas, environmental monitoring, pest con-

trol, mold control and remediation, outfitting records storage areas, and disaster planning.

For the updated list, consult the ADAH website at: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/whatsnew/disastervendors.html>.

## ADAH to offer IPER training on essential records preservation

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is leading a project to develop and deliver web- and CD-based disaster preparedness training to state and local governments nationwide. The Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) project is made possible by a \$2.6 million award from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It builds upon CoSA's Emergency Preparedness Initiative, which began after the hurricanes of 2005, and gains additional relevance for Alabamians after last month's disaster.

As part of this initiative, ADAH Government Records Division staff will offer the IPER online course "Essential Records" to Alabama localities this summer. This 7.5 hour course (sections of which will be presented in four webinars on each Monday in August) will prepare participants to:

- Identify their agency's essential records;
- Analyze and prioritize records, assessing specific risks and identifying protection strategies;
- Specify time frames for essential records' availability in emergencies;
- Develop procedures to ensure access to and security of essential records;
- Outline an essential records plan for inclusion in the agency's Continuity of Operations (COOP) Program; and
- Become familiar with federal, state, and local COOP regulations and procedures.

The IPER Project is working with teams in every state and territory, who will deliver IPER webinars to state and local governments within their bor-

ders. The teams are also responsible for identifying relevant materials for their state or territory's IPER Resource Center. In addition, teams are being encouraged to strengthen relationships among the three disciplines primarily responsible for records-related disaster preparedness and response: emergency management, archives and records management, and information technology.

More information about IPER (staff, courses, and other projects and resources) is available at the CoSA Resource Center: <http://rc.statearchivists.org/Content/IPER-Project.aspx>. GRD staff will disseminate more news about forthcoming IPER webinars as plans for them develop. Meanwhile, interested agencies can contact Tracey Berezansky, Tom Turley, or Christine Garrett at (334)242-4452 or [records@archives.alabama.gov](mailto:records@archives.alabama.gov).