

The Alabama Media Group Collection
Alabama Department of Archives and History

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE DONATION

What is being given?

[Alabama Media Group](#) is donating its massive collection of historical photographic negatives that chronicled the people, places, and events of the 20th century for the state's largest newspapers. The gift is being made to the [Alabama Department of Archives and History](#) (ADAH) for the people of Alabama as the state prepares to begin its bicentennial commemoration in 2017.

The collection contains more than 3 million photographic negatives taken by newspaper photographers working for The Birmingham News, The Huntsville Times, and Mobile's Press-Register between the 1920s and the early 2000s. Some images from other publications, including the defunct Birmingham Post-Herald and predecessors, became part of the collection over time. The negatives are organized generally by photo assignment in chronological order and stored in paper sleeves typically used by photojournalists for film photography. In addition to the physical negatives, Alabama Media Group is transferring copyright to the ADAH.

What is Alabama Media Group?

Alabama Media Group produces [AL.com](#), the state's largest news and entertainment network, and three of Alabama's most prominent newspapers: The Birmingham News, The Huntsville Times and Mobile's Press-Register, as well as Birmingham magazine.

What is the Alabama Department of Archives and History?

Founded in 1901, the [Alabama Department of Archives and History](#) (ADAH) was the first independently administered state archival and historical agency in the U.S. From its inception, the ADAH has acquired, preserved, and provided access to public records created by state government, a wide range of manuscript and other private collections, and three-dimensional objects.

What is Alabama Media Group receiving in return for the collection?

As the negatives are identified, cataloged, and digitized by the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama Media Group will receive a copy of the digital images and descriptive information for use in its storytelling in print, online and on video. No monetary payment is being made in exchange for the collection.

What is the significance of this gift?

The collection is the largest donation of historical imagery ever received by the Alabama Department of Archives and History. It documents almost every aspect of life in Alabama for a period spanning more than eight decades. It is an unparalleled visual record of our state in the 20th century.

How is the collection getting to the State Archives?

Coleman Worldwide Moving of Dothan is generously donating its services to relocate the collection from Mobile to the State Archives building in Montgomery, where it will be permanently preserved.

ACCESSING THE COLLECTION

How can I see the photos?

In a process that will last several years, the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) will scan the negatives and display the images online at an [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#) within its [Digital Collections site](#).

The first images will not appear online until after the ADAH conducts a preliminary survey of the collection to assess its scope and to evaluate any conservation needs. The first phase of work is expected to last through mid-2017. Once scanning of the negatives begins, new content will be uploaded regularly.

Selected images from the collection were scanned previously by Alabama Media Group and will remain online at AL.com. Check out earlier discoveries at [AL.com Vintage](#).

Will the entire contents of the collection be posted online?

In instances where a photography assignment produced multiple shots of the same scene, typically only a selection of representative images will be posted online. The collection may also contain photographs not appropriate for younger visitors, such as images of auto accidents or crime scenes. This content will be preserved but not made available online.

How long will it take for all of the photos to be online?

It will take years to digitize and identify the millions of images that make up the collection. First, the Alabama Department of Archives and History is developing a searchable index of the handwritten and typewritten labels on envelopes of film negatives to make images easier to find. The first images are expected to appear online in mid-2017, and more images will be added on a regular basis.

Will I be able to request a photo that's not online?

After the Alabama Department of Archives and History completes its initial survey of the collection, reference requests for specific images not appearing online will be accepted. Instructions for submitting reference requests will be available on the [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#) beginning in mid-2017. Research fees may apply.

Due to the special handling requirements of the collection and ongoing processing by ADAH staff, public access to the original film negatives will not be available.

Alabama Media Group is helping ADAH prioritize photos of greatest interest for digitization. To do that, we need your help. What topics would you like to explore? Send your suggestions to life@al.com

Will I be able to search for photos of a particular person, place, or event?

Two options for searching the collection will be available beginning in mid-2017.

1) A database of existing labels on the film-negative envelopes will be searchable based on the information recorded by photographers when the images were taken. The database will reside on the Alabama Department of Archives and History's website, with a link provided on the [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#).

2) As each image is scanned, it will be tagged with keywords used by the ADAH for all of its digital collections. These keywords can be searched from within the Digital Collections site.

Why can't I find a photo of a particular person, place, or event?

With millions of images in the collection, it will take time for the Alabama Department of Archives and History to catalog, research and digitize photos. Even after that process is complete, there are other reasons photos may not be found:

- *Envelopes containing film negatives may have incomplete, incorrect, or indecipherable labels that make it difficult to identify locations, dates, and names.*
- *After photos were published in newspapers, the film negatives may have deteriorated or been lost, discarded, or given away over the years.*
- *The photos may have never existed. Not all events or subjects were photographed by newspaper staff.*

REPRINTS, LICENSING, AND PERMISSIONS FOR USE

May I use these photos in my book / documentary / website / classroom / media publication?

Yes, but permission for use must be received in writing from the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Permission forms and instructions will be available on the [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#) when the collection is open for reference and use in mid-2017.

What is the cost for using an image?

There is no charge for not-for-profit or educational uses, but permission for any use must be received in writing from the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Commercial use of an image is subject to a reproduction rights fee and permission granted in writing by the ADAH.

Permission forms and instructions will be available at the [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#) when the collection is open for reference and use in mid-2017.

For more information, contact Meredith McDonough (meredith.mcdonough@archives.alabama.gov, 334-353-5442).

How can I get a copy of a photo?

Requests for copies from the Alabama Department of Archives and History may be submitted using a form that will be available on the [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#) starting in mid-2017.

A list of formats and prices will be available at the same location.

May I use these photos on merchandise that I sell?

Commercial use of an image is subject to a reproduction rights fee and permission granted through the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Permission forms and instructions will be available at the [Alabama Media Group Collection page](#) when the collection is open for reference and use in mid-2017.

For more information, contact Meredith McDonough (meredith.mcdonough@archives.alabama.gov, 334-353-5442).

OTHER ARCHIVED CONTENT

How can I find an article from the newspapers' archives?

Public libraries have local newspapers' entire publication history available on microfilm and can guide you in your research.

- *For The Birmingham News, contact the [Birmingham Public Library](#) at (205) 226-3625 or www.bplonline.org/services/ask.*
- *For The Huntsville Times, contact the [Huntsville-Madison County Public Library](#) at (256) 532-5975 or email askus@hmcpl.org.*
- *For the Press-Register, contact the [Mobile Public Library](#) at (251) 208-7093 or email mainlhq@mplonline.org.*

In Montgomery, the EBSCO Research Room at the Alabama Department of Archives and History also has the newspapers available on microfilm. Visit the [ADAH's newspaper microfilm page](#) or call (334) 242-4435 for more information.

How can I purchase a reprint of a page or article from the newspapers' archives?

Color reproductions of many newspaper pages produced since 2005 may be purchased from Alabama Media Group at its [online store](#).

Additionally, public libraries have local newspapers' entire publication history available on microfilm and can provide black-and-white photocopies for a fee.

- *For The Birmingham News, contact the [Birmingham Public Library](#) at (205) 226-3625 or <http://www.bplonline.org/services/ask>.*
- *For The Huntsville Times, contact the [Huntsville-Madison County Public Library](#) at (256) 532-5975 or email askus@hmcpl.org.*
- *For the Press-Register, contact the [Mobile Public Library](#) at (251) 208-7093 or email mainlhq@mplonline.org.*

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