

*Alabama Historical Records Advisory
Board*



*Plan for Preserving Alabama's
Historical Records*

2008

The Condition of the Records... ..

The basic finding of the 1985 report, *Assessing Alabama's Archives*, was that "major new efforts are necessary if our documentary heritage is to survive." Since then, efforts by the archival community in Alabama have resulted in many improvements. There are now nineteen local archival repositories in the state. Concerned records keepers have removed records from attic and basement storage areas in many county courthouses. Description standards and imaging standards have lead to better access to archival holdings. However, there is still work to be done to ensure the long-term preservation of Alabama's historical records. As the volume and complexity of historical records increases; the need to address preservation issues becomes more pressing.

The Organization...

The Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board (HRAB), created by law in 2006, is responsible for providing leadership and guidance to identify, preserve, and provide access to Alabama's historical records. The Board also works to strengthen public awareness of the uses and value of these records.

The Board was established pursuant to federal legislation which created the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). The NHPRC makes grants nationwide to help identify, preserve, and provide public access to records, photographs, and other materials that document American history. The state board's mission, as defined in Federal regulation, is to serve as "the central advisory body for historical records planning and to facilitate cooperation among historical records repositories and other information agencies within the state; and as a state-level review body for grant proposals for NHPRC-funded projects developed and carried out within the State."



The Charge.....

One of the first tasks of the Board required by the NHPRC was to develop a plan. In initiating a new planning cycle, a committee of the Board reviewed the 1985 *Assessing Alabama's Archives* report and evaluated records preservation activities in the state since 1986. Committee members also reviewed similar studies in other states. To complete the data-gathering phase of plan development, the committee and ADAH staff members conducted surveys of both Alabama historical records repositories and users. Finally, the committee refined the survey information through three focus group sessions held in January 2008.



The Findings.....

Each HRAB member organization distributed survey information to its membership, reaching approximately 7,330 Alabamians. The survey project resulted in 738 completed historical records users' surveys and 60 completed repository surveys. The survey responses can be categorized into the following broad topics: access, preservation, funding, and advocacy. The main concerns of those who completed the surveys

were:

- **access** -- lack of enough trained staff in repositories to process collections, digitize collections, assist researchers, or to keep facilities open for longer hours of operation
- **storage/preservation** – records are maintained in attics, basements, or other places lacking environmental controls; adequate storage space is not available to hold the volume of records; or the records are in poor condition because of mold, insect infestation, improper handling, and other environmental threats
- **funding** – lack of financial commitment to the preservation of historical records on the part of parent organizations or oversight personnel and
- **advocacy/public awareness** -- lack of public knowledge about the role and work of historical repositories and the value of the historical records they hold.

The three focus groups reviewed the survey data and the executive summary of the 1985 assessment report. During each session, a facilitator guided each group in refining the data and developing recommendations for future HRAB activities. The focus groups presented the Board with twenty-four specific recommendations under the headings of Access, Education, Preservation, and Support/Advocacy.



The HRAB formally reviewed the findings and recommendations during a strategic planning retreat held on February 4, 2008. Using the recommended actions, survey responses, and general discussions during the meeting, the Board developed the following outline of priorities for its future work.

The Plan.....

The HRAB identified four goals to be addressed over the next several years that will impact the future of the state's historical records. They are:

Goals

- Ensure that citizens of the state can locate Alabama's historical records and gain access to them.
- Educate records holders about handling and preserving historical records in all formats.
 - Promote the continued development of archival repositories around the state to strengthen the infrastructure for the preservation of Alabama's historical records.
 - Improve public awareness of the need to preserve Alabama's historical records.
- Use archival resources to help improve history education in K-12 classrooms.



As part of the planning process, the HRAB also identified several specific actions it can support, coordinate, or promote over the next five years to accomplish the identified goals. They are:

Activities

1. The Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) will establish a web-based clearinghouse of records preservation “best practices” and a directory of contact and holdings information about local repositories. Once the site is established, it will be monitored and updated regularly.
2. In partnership with other interested organizations such as the Society of Alabama Archivists (SALA), the Alabama Municipal Clerks Association, and the League of Municipalities, the Board will develop and provide training opportunities around the state on the proper care and handling of historical records, disaster preparedness, outreach, and advocacy.
3. Board staff will distribute press releases and other informational materials across the state regarding the Board, its mission, and its activities to promote a broader awareness of historical records issues in Alabama.
4. The Board will seek to work with the State Education Department and the Alabama History Education Initiative (AHEI) to advocate strengthened history education in K-12 classrooms.
5. The Board will provide small grants to local repositories for records preservation activities (contingent upon funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission [NHPRC] or establishment of a state funded program).
6. The Board will work to address the records processing backlogs in local repositories by investigating a consortia staffing solution to process the records.
7. The Board will promote the development of local historical records repositories throughout Alabama.



For additional information about the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board or its activities, please visit <http://www.hrb.alabama.gov> or call 334-242-4452.

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Alabama Department of Archives and History

Alabama Association of Municipal Clerks & Administrators (2011)

Ms. Gina Antolini, City Clerk, City of Columbiana

Alabama Circuit Clerks' Association (2011)

Honorable Jeannie Gibson, Crenshaw County Circuit Clerk

Alabama Genealogical Society, Inc. (2010)

Ms. Elizabeth C. Wells, AGS President
Samford University

Alabama Historical Association (2010)

Dr. David Alsobrook, Director
Museum of Mobile

Alabama League of Municipalities (2011)

Ms. Lori Lein, League Counsel

Alabama Library Association (2010)

Mr. Clark Center, Archivist
University of Alabama

Alabama Press Association (2011)

Mr. Bob Davis, Editor
The Anniston Star

Association of County Commissions of Alabama (2009)

Ms. Donna K. Llewellyn
Colbert County Administrator

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (2010)

Mr. Wayne Coleman, Archivist

Black Heritage Council (2009)

Mr. David Tuck, Rockford, AL

Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (2011)

Mr. Rickey D. Best
Dean, Auburn University Montgomery Library

Probate Judges Association (2009)

Honorable Sheila Moore
Winston County Probate Judge

Society of Alabama Archivists (2009)

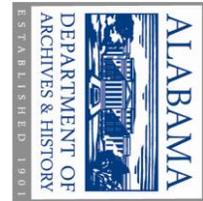
Ms. Lyn Frazer, Archivist, Montgomery County Archives

Sons of Confederate Veterans (2009)

Mr. Leonard Wilson, Commander

United Daughters of the Confederacy (2010)

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