



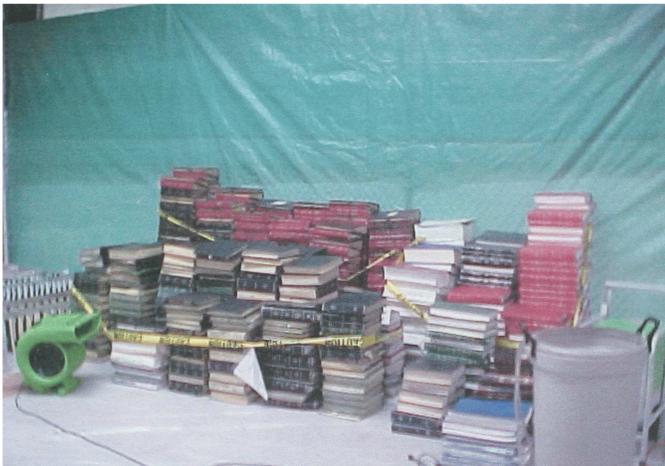
State & Local Records News

Vol. 9, No. 2

Published by the ADAH Government Records Division

August 2004

Lee County revenue officials, ADAH staff, local vendor salvage fire-damaged records



Lee County tax records air-drying during salvage

On the night of July 25, a fire broke out in the Lee County Courthouse in Opelika. Although local firefighters quickly extinguished it, several computers and a number of tax records in the revenue department were destroyed. Fire- and water-damaged records were later transported to the headquarters of SERVPRO, a disaster recovery vendor in Montgomery, where salvage operations began.

SERVPRO staff, coordinating with ADAH archivists Linda Overman and Tom Turley, oversaw air-drying of the charred and sodden records. Where possible, damp volumes were stood on end, with space between for drying. The wettest records were placed in a sealed, air-conditioned tent, while others were arranged on plastic sheeting under

fans. Large dehumidifiers pulled moisture from the air and into buckets. Once the records were dry, SERVPRO used dry rubber sponges to remove soot and a fog deodorizer to neutralize smoke odor.

Some records were burned too badly to be salvaged; and, to limit Lee County's recovery costs, ADAH authorized the destruction of damaged records with short retention periods under the county taxation RDA. On August 4, archivist Frank Brown returned to SERVPRO to assist revenue department staff in completing the forms required for public records to be legally destroyed. (See the leaflet "Records Destruction Procedures for Local Governments" at: www.archives.state.al.us/officials/destructionproc00.html).

For more on salvaging fire-damaged records, see "Ask the Archivist" on p. 4.

36 attend local archives workshop conducted by ADAH

Thirty-six local officials, historians, and genealogists participated in the ADAH workshop "Developing a Local Archives," held at the League of Municipalities building in Montgomery on Friday, August 6.

Providing instruction were ADAH archivists Frank Brown, Linda Overman, and Tom Turley, along with the directors of several active local archives programs: Susan Bzdell of the Morgan County Archives, Lyn Frazer of the Montgomery County Archives, Coll'ette King of the Mobile

County Probate Court Archives, and Rhonda Larkin of the Madison County Record Center. Among the topics covered were establishing poli-



Mobile County archivist Coll'ette King speaks at the ADAH workshop

tical support and funding; selecting and renovating storage sites; collecting, processing, and preserving archival records; employing volunteers; and providing records management and reference services to local government agencies and researchers.

Based on the workshop's success, ADAH hopes to repeat it regionally in north and south Alabama, perhaps in the fall and spring. *State and Local Records News* will offer more information on these plans as they develop.

Records Commissions approve new RDAs, publication

At its meeting on July 21, 2004, the **State Records Commission** approved a new records disposition authority (RDA) for the Alabama State Board of Prosthetists and Orthotists. The commission also approved a major revision of the RDA for the Alabama High School of Mathematics and Science and minor revisions of three other RDAs. Finally, commission members evaluated RDA implementation reports from 26 state agencies.

Also meeting on July 21, the **Local Government Records Commission** approved major revisions of the RDAs for municipalities and regional planning commissions and minor revisions of the RDAs for health care authorities and the Jefferson Rehabilitation and Health Center. It also approved a change in the retention of Routine Correspondence for all agencies of local government.

Both commissions approved a revision of the ADAH technical leaflet "Preparing a Contract for Archival-Quality Microfilming Services."

The commissions' next quarterly meetings will take place on **Wednesday, October 27, 2004**. The State Records Commission will begin at 10:00 a.m., and the Local Government Records Commission at 1:30 p.m. Due to construction at ADAH, both meetings are scheduled in the Alabama League of Municipalities building across from the Archives.

Montgomery County Sheriff's Department finds historic Civil Rights photographs

While clearing space in an old storeroom in mid-July, Montgomery County Chief Deputy Derrick Cunningham began looking through some dusty volumes filled with photographs. Inside, he discovered original "mug shots" of Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Fred Gray, and Ralph Abernathy, made at the time of their arrest in 1956 during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

The photographs, in virtually pristine condition, have attracted nationwide attention. Representatives from MSNBC and the Smithsonian have examined them, and the images of Dr. King and Mrs. Parks have appeared on the Internet. Although plans for storing and exhibiting the photographs are incomplete, they will probably be placed in a historical museum at the sheriff's department or in the Montgomery County Archives. Other interested agencies, including various Civil Rights repositories and ADAH, will obtain copies.

New GSU camera operators arrive in Alabama

Two new camera operator couples have recently arrived in Alabama to carry on the ADAH-GSU loose records microfilming program. Rod and RaNae Richards, from Smithfield, Utah, will continue the



The Richards at their microfilming camera

filming of ADAH county and private record collections of genealogical importance. The Richards take over for our last “in-house” camera operators, the Jenkins, and expect to be in Alabama for 18-24 months. They will begin work on Perry County chancery court estate files dated 1833 to 1917.

The Colquetts and Stockmans, records preparation volunteers at ADAH, have finished arranging 29 cubic feet of Montgomery County marriage licenses (1827-1936) and are now at work on Calhoun County chancery court records. Elder Richards has designed a couple of hydraulic “presses” to assist them in flattening the files.

Also, another “field” camera operator couple, DeLoy and Lois Larsen, from Blackfoot, Idaho, arrived in June to film estate files and marriage licenses at the Russell County Probate Office. The Larsens also hope to film in Crenshaw and Choctaw Counties during their time in Alabama.

Dumpster Diving

Question: *When is a government record placed in a dumpster for destruction not destroyed?*

Answer: *When a well-meaning citizen removes it from the dumpster!*

One of the most satisfying projects we work on with state and local agencies is the destruction of government records that have fulfilled their retention periods. Many times these “clean-up” projects involve emptying basement or attic spaces and placing all of the records scheduled for destruction into dumpsters located outside government buildings. This has been a standard practice in Alabama for many years. A recent eBay auction highlighted one significant problem with this practice: dumpsters not immediately emptied provide an opportunity for someone to liberate the contents for their personal use. This is exactly what occurred in one Alabama municipality.

Last month, an ADAH staff member noticed that municipal tax records were being offered for sale on eBay. We notified the municipality about the auction and they worked with the seller to return the materials to municipal custody. It seems that the records were placed in dumpsters for destruction more than 20 years ago. A citizen, who felt that the records should not be destroyed, removed them from the dumpster and took them home. The records remained there until recently, when the individual gave them to a friend who decided to sell them on eBay.

While this story had a happy ending, agencies that destroy records in the future using the dumpster method should take several precautions. They are: ensure that dumpsters used for records destruction are immediately emptied by the sanitation company that operates the service; ensure that all loose pages or books make it into the dumpster; and, if records containing personal information are placed in the dumpster, consider following the

records to the dump to ensure that they are properly buried.

recovery, contact ADAH conservation officer Linda Overman at (334)242-4452, ext. 229, or Linda.Overman@archives.alabama.gov.

Ask the Archivist

Question: *What are the procedures for recovering fire- and water-damaged records?*

If the records are only charred or smoke-damaged, salvage can be postponed indefinitely. Carefully wrap charred records between sheets of cardboard to prevent crumbling. Later, pages can be trimmed, soot removed, and books rebound. Records can also be photocopied, microfilmed, or scanned, after which the damaged originals can be either wrapped and saved or destroyed according to the Local Government Record's Commission's approved procedures.

Air-drying is usually employed for records that are only damp or wet in places. Move them to a clean, dry area where temperature and relative humidity can be kept low to prevent mold growth. Place a dehumidifier in the room and use fans to keep the air moving at all times. Cover floors and tables with Visqueen (plastic sheeting) before placing records on them. If volumes will stand up without sagging, they may be stood on end, with a stack of paper towels under them to absorb water. Volumes may also be dried "flat" by placing paper towels between pages at 25-page intervals. Replace the towels when they get wet.

Vacuum freeze-drying may be necessary when records are thoroughly soaked or there are too many to salvage immediately. Because of its expense, freeze-drying is most appropriate for permanent or vital records. With this process, wet or frozen records are placed in a specially designed chamber and the oxygen pulled out to create a vacuum. Water passes from a solid (frozen) phase to a vapor phase without going through a liquid phase, which lessens the chance of additional damage to the paper.

For more information, a list of records salvage vendors, or help with disaster planning and