

Strategic Plan



Baldwin County

Department of Archives and History

312 Courthouse Square, Suite 26

Bay Minette, Alabama 36507

Phone: 251-580-1897

Fax: 251-580-2528

Basis For Strategic Plan

1. Mission statement from Baldwin County 1994 Strategic Plan:

“To preserve and capitalize on the unique history of Baldwin County and its influence on the present and future.” An additional strength that should be included in the 2005 Strategic Plan that was remiss from the 1994 plan is the rich tradition of historical pride that pervades the entire county and has become a way of life for each county resident. We should embrace this historical pride by ensuring that the historical record is maintained.

How can this be done? Collect and preserve the historical record of both the county government and the individual experiences of the county residents, past and present. This will be discussed further in the long-term goals section.

2. Legal statute:

The duty of local governments in their openness to public scrutiny is at the foundation of the Baldwin County Department of Archives and History. Alabama law requires public officials to create and maintain records that document the business of their office. These records must be protected from “mutilation, loss, or destruction,” so that they may be transferred to an official’s successors, in office and made available to members of the public. Under the Code of Alabama 1975, Section 36-12-40, “every citizen has a right to inspect and take a copy of any public writing in this state, except as otherwise expressly provided by statute.” Records must also be kept in accordance with auditing standards approved by the Examiners of Public Accounts (Code of Alabama 1975, Section 36-12-2, 36-12-4, and 41-5-23).

To better serve county offices and to provide more efficient access to public records, the Baldwin County Department of Archives and History has adopted the Records Disposition Authority (RDA) issued by the Local Government Records Commission under authority granted by the Code of Alabama 1975.

Additionally, the Baldwin County Department of Archives and History, according to Act No. 98-579 of the State Legislature, “The Baldwin County Archives shall provide assistance to the departments of the Baldwin County Government in the development and operations of the Record Management Program of the county upon request from the department and with the approval of the County Commission.”

Immediate Goals

1. Completion of Archival Facility:

With the completion of the Baldwin County Archives Facility and its subsequent dedication in February 2006, our focus on the structure has changed to include engineering increased efficiency through innovative workspace. Included

in plans for 2007 is the completion of a customized work station for the document processing area. The work will be completed in-house through the Baldwin County Building Maintenance Department. Also as a part of our 2007 goals we plan to purchase a microfilm/microfiche reader-printer for use with microfilm we will be receiving from the Probate Judge's office and from the County Commission Administration offices.

Long-term goals for the present structure include the improvement to document access for employees. We will strive to accomplish this through the installation of permanent rolling ladders in the three main storage areas in the archives facility. We would also like to expand our scanning station to allow for the copy and digitization of large sized documents. At present, we have a flatbed scanner that allows Archives personnel the opportunity to scan photographs and loose documents up to 8 ½ X 14. In the future we would like to be able to scan large bound documents, place the scanned images online for patrons, and conserve the well-worn originals. Scanned image samples will be placed online for patron use and will be maintained in total in files accessible to patrons who visit us in person. The records of scanned images will be searchable through an online catalog that will be made available through a joint effort with the Computer Information Systems Department.

2. Survey of Departmental records:

Our primary goal here is to inventory the historic records of each department of the Baldwin County government including, the offices of the Baldwin County Commission, the judge of probate, the office of the revenue commissioner, the circuit clerk, and the sheriff's department. Once department records are surveyed and a detailed inventory is taken a determination will be made as to the documents that will be transferred to the county archives facility based on the Retention Disposition Authority provided by the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH). Documents with a permanent retention or a retention of substantial time-span will be removed to the archives. Those items will be accessioned, formally processed and properly stored. During processing, the archived items will be cataloged for easy access by county officials and county residents, as well as researchers from across the state and country. Proper precautions will be taken to ensure the privacy of individuals under the employ of the county government such as Social Security numbers of past and present employees.

Records will be cataloged initially through a paper/manual system utilizing paper finding aides that pinpoint the location of items housed in the archival facility. Materials with a short life span, for example documents with a retention schedule of 1,3,5 years, will be maintained in their present locations until they are properly destroyed. The accession process will secure the physical and intellectual control over documents vital to the preservation of Baldwin County's history.

3. Streamlining Document Maintenance :

The archives department will develop, as a continuing mission, the support of each county department that it serves by promoting and assisting in timely

destruction of documents after their useful life span has been exceeded. At the same time the archival department will continue to conduct yearly surveys of each department in order to retain historical documents in the archives, as well as, remove documents that have surpassed their retention deadline.

4. Collection of Historical Material:

The BCDAH will endeavor to obtain and preserve the historical record of the county beyond that of governmental documentation. In doing so the BCDAH will actively seek items from individuals such as diaries, personal correspondence, memorabilia, photos, etc. that tell the story of Baldwin County's rich past. As a part of this far ranging project the archives will conduct oral histories of county residents concerning their experiences growing up and living in South Alabama. We will video tape the conversations and transcribe the tapes which can then be used by historians and other interested researchers (please see long-range goals).

Timetable for Immediate Goals

It is the intention of the Baldwin County Department of Archives and History to accomplish or to put into place the immediate goals of this department within the first year of operation. Immediate goals, although initiated right-away, will continue to be an integral component in the overall plan subscribed to by the BCDAH.

Long-Range Goals

1. Graduate Student Internships:

The archives is pursuing a program designed to incorporate qualified, trained archival graduate students from academic programs within the state in the gathering and processing of material from government offices and donations from individuals. Money can be allocated from the archives budget to begin the program and grants to continue the program in a larger scale can be pursued for the future. Projects currently assigned to interns include the Oral History Project and the complete processing of historic and modern documents produced by county government and individual Baldwin County residents.

2. Web Page Creation:

The Archives webpage is operational and expanding daily as it provides a large portion of our target audience (county officials/employees, county residents, researchers) unhindered access to items we maintain. Thusfar, links have been provided for finding aides and inventories of collections processed, cataloged and available for patron use. Administration information including staff organization, archives origins, archives location, collection policy and use policy are available. A fully accessible collection guide and an introduction to our Oral History Project

inform users about our present collection and our goals for the future of our collections.

Future additions of the website will include an online catalog of documents/collections held in our facility as well as digital samples of scanned photos and documents. Supplementary video samples of the ongoing Oral History Project will be added as the project expands.

3. Scanning Projects:

In a related project that will be ongoing for the life of the archives, we plan to implement scanning projects for donated photos and for deteriorating documents. This will serve two purposes; it will extend the life of the original documents and provide more open access to the digitized versions. Researchers would be able to study these documents from home through our web site. We have united with the Baldwin County Board of Education in an effort to secure a complete history of the Baldwin County Education system. This will include oral histories of instrumental members of the educational system as well as photographic and documentary collections that piece together the rich history of the county's educational institutions. In the coming months the BCDAH will work diligently to acquire grant funding to digitize and electronically store the data collected in the Board of Education project. Furthermore, in order to accomplish this task the BCDAH must invest in scanning equipment, the software necessary to maintain the digital record and an efficient means to reproduce high quality copies of the material obtained in the project. This project should also be initiated during the archives first year of operation and continue until completed.

4. Migration of Records from Paper to Electronic:

In a joint project with the county's Computer Information Systems Department (CIS) the BCDAH plans to transfer our catalog of finding aides and inventory lists from paper to an electronic medium in the form of an online catalog. Project Coordinators within CIS have contacted vendors and a pilot program to test available technology should be under way within a few months. Our goal is to have the online system operational during the 2007 fiscal year.

As a result of such an electronic system patrons will be able to view BCDAH records online before visiting our facility.

5. Bicentennial:

Baldwin County's 200th Anniversary will take place in 2009. Preliminary planning should begin immediately with the implementation of a steering committee to formulate the extent to which each community would prefer to mark the event. Subsequent committees can then be formed to explore any ideas that the steering committee may propose. The County Commission, through the efforts of the BCDAH, can set the foundation for the celebration of the county's birthday while allowing each community to contribute to the whole and to expand their own efforts in the event.

6. New Building (Extension):

Within the next five years we hope to expand from the present archives building to an extension or second structure that can be used for archival storage for government documents and personal papers that will be donated or purchased in the near future. In addition, we would propose that the extension be a multi-story facility that will feature a large display area on the ground floor for artifacts and climate-controlled storage within the additional floors.

7. Purchase of Personal or Corporate Papers:

To compliment the collection of county government documents housed within the BCDAH we propose to purchase any corporate records or personal papers that may not be donated and are critical to better understanding the history of Baldwin County. Justification for the purchase of such items is centered around the need to compile a complete history of the county in a manner that facilitates the accessibility of material to the public.

8. Purchase of Published Material Relevant to Baldwin County:

In an effort to offer a complete history of Baldwin County, the BCDAH should undertake the long-term project of collecting published materials that focus on the historical aspects of Baldwin County. Works to be collected should include books, journals, and articles written by local authors and similar publications written on local history. Work to construct a bibliography of such works should begin immediately.

9. Development of Digital Projects:

To better ensure broad availability of historic documents and photographs, we hope to digitize both information mediums and publish them as a link to our website. Digital projects include, but are not limited to a photographic and documentary listing of the properties recognized by the Baldwin County Historic Development Commission. Depending on the software availability, we may be able to provide web patrons a virtual tour of these properties. This same type of virtual tour could also be made available to feature the county's historic public sites. A photographic and documentary archive may also be constructed from any donated and purchased documents and photos.

10. Seeking Outside Funding:

Regardless of county funding, the county archives will seek grant money to complete various projects such as the proposed joint venture with the Baldwin County Board of Education through which a digitized copy of historic documents and photographs outlining the history of education in the county can be preserved. Similar digital projects that capture the distinctive flavor of Baldwin County history through personal history can be subsidized through potential grant money that will be sought from state and federal sources. One such federal source that will be actively pursued is a "Planning Grant for Museums, Libraries, and Special Projects" from the National Endowment for the Humanities which can be used for joint-venture projects such as the Board of Education collaboration.

11. Restoration of Bound Volumes:

Once physical and intellectual control has been established over the county government documents the BCDAH will most likely address the need to not only preserve, but to restore many of the deteriorated documents that are found in almost all county departments. As with many governmentally produced documents, these records represent the only copy of that particular record in existence. For that reason it is imperative to allocate funds to complete this project.

12. Involvement of Volunteers:

It is imperative that the BCDAH employ volunteers, especially during the early phases of development when a dearth of labor could slow the processing of the mass amounts of records that will migrate to the archival facility. Without appropriations for a large staff the efficient, orderly process of documents will rely on assistance from the local community. Energetic volunteers can be easily trained to handle the complexities of accessioning, processing, and properly shelving documents in a brief course accompanied by the BCDAH processing manual that is already in place. Moreover, involvement by community members should serve as an educational vehicle to create a broader-based understanding of the need to preserve the county's heritage. In this case, word-of-mouth from volunteers to curious county residents is a priceless commodity in our effort to become more connected to the people of Baldwin County.

13. Speaking Tour/Presentations:

Building on the theme of education, I would like to initiate a speaking tour with various organizations throughout the county as a means of amplifying our goals in serving the citizenry of Baldwin County. Through this educational effort we can introduce the importance of our work to an expanded audience inspiring more volunteer workers and donations of individual papers. Once the archival facility is completed I would like to sponsor a series of presentations either by myself or special guests that would highlight our progress and feature the history of the region. This effort could focus on local clubs and organizations or youth groups from the county school system. To facilitate this project the BCDAH should purchase a laptop computer and a video projector that can be used on site and when traveling to events throughout the county.

14. Video History Project:

Immediately and as a long-term project I will be working with David Brewer, Assistant to the County Commission for Special Projects, to complete video projects that will document the county's history. A series of videos depicting various aspects of the rich heritage of Baldwin County are planned for the future. I hope to provide historic insight and commentary to the video series co-produced by Brewer and Joseph Johns who owns a Mobile-based production company. I anticipate incorporating the experience gained from the work with Brewer and Johns in a complimentary manner with the BCDAH oral history project that will be discussed in detail in a separate section.

15. Oral Histories Project:

The BCDAH proposes to conduct a series of oral history video recordings over an extended period of time to further detail the history of Baldwin County. We intend to video tape sessions with Baldwin County residents as they recount experiences at various points in history and on myriad subjects. This series should include wide-ranging viewpoints from a vast array of Baldwin County residents. Topics should include religion, education, community, labor, agriculture, recreation, politics, etc. The oral history series can be recorded on DVD for a more stable storage medium and will be supplemented with a typed transcription of the interviews that will also be preserved.

16. Archival Processing Technician:

The vast quantity of records produced by the Baldwin Commission offices and those of the Revenue Commissioner, Probate Judge, and Circuit Clerk will likely mean an archival technician will need to be hired in the next 1-3 years to assist in the processing effort. A technical assistant would also allow the archivist time to pursue the inventory of documents, speaking with county political and civic groups, and research into private collections that can be added to the archives collection. A promising pool from which to draw a qualified candidate could be the group of interns that participate in the internship program during the first year of operation.

17. Purchase of Working Farm:

In the next 5-10 years farming in Baldwin County most likely will exhibit a steady decline, yielding to the demand for housing space to service a major population increase. Many areas that have traditionally been agricultural are increasingly being sold to developers who immediately transform the area into tract housing. As a result, Baldwin County is in danger of losing touch with its agricultural heritage. To solve that problem and to preserve an important portion of Baldwin County history, the BCDAH proposes to purchase a working farm that can be maintained and operated in traditional methods that depict the evolution of farming over the past 200 years. Farm products and technology as they have changed over the past two centuries should be the focus of the site which, in turn, could be used as an educational tool for the county's residents and the students in the region's school systems.

18. Outside Contracts to Preserve Records:

As a means of generating funds to foster a self sustaining department the BCDAH plans to enter into contracts with other county entities to maintain their records. This long-term project will only be possible after the archives primary goals are met and the maintenance of priority records are in place. Secondary collection projects can be better met through the funds generated through this project. We may also be able to generate funding by entering into agreements to inventory records for outside agencies and to service their records based on a Records Disposition Authority supplied by the organization or through the Alabama Department of Archives and History.