

Q&A with Baldwin County's Archivist

In honor of National Archives Month this October, we are celebrating Baldwin County's own Archives, a treasure trove that catalogs Baldwin County's 212 years of history. Archivist Felisha Anderson answers frequently asked questions related to the Archives and her role as the County's Archivist, since taking the position in 2014.

What is the Archives?

The Archives started as one man's dream. Tolbert Brantley, a local attorney, and former attorney for the Baldwin County Commission sought to bring all of Baldwin County's records under one roof.

In the late 1990's that dream became reality. Alabama Legislature enacted Baldwin County legislation establishing the Baldwin County Department of Archives and History a department under the Baldwin County Commission. We hold records from our county courts and county departments. We are charged with the preservation, documentation and making the records available to the public. The archives are made up of publications, photographs, documentaries, commission minutes, court records, multimedia, a few artifacts, county departmental records, and special collections which explain the historical events, growth and development of the County. The Archives is in Bay Minette.

Who can use the Archives?

Genealogists, educators and students, personal researchers, museum curators, writers, athletes, historians, and the general community are welcome to use the Archives for research and discovery.

What is archived and what isn't?

We exist to collect, preserve, and share the records and documents that tell the story of Baldwin County. So, our goal is to archive everything related to that story. However, if the physical condition of the asset has deteriorated, for instance, it is moldy or pest-infested, we must consider what it would take to preserve it and make it accessible and weigh that against retaining the asset.

How are old and fragile documents preserved?

The Archives has received everything from floppy discs to ¾" videotape and CD/DVDs to microfilm. It is an absolute challenge to keep up with digital files. In order to digitize an asset, such as a photograph, map or document, we scan it at high resolution, save it on a secure server and create additional files that can be used for more frequent and easier access. We are currently working on an on-going digitization initiative to make archived records available to the public.

Assets are housed in temperature and humidity-controlled areas. Assets are stored in archival folders and heavy archival plastic sleeves to help support fragile documents. Folders and sleeves are stored inside acid-free archival boxes as the Gaylord document case or flat drop flat box.

What's the oldest item in the collection?

The oldest document in our collections is a 1777 letter from Sam Houston to Major General Edmund Pendleton Gaines. General Gaines commanded the garrison at Fort Stoddert. He was involved in the arrest of Aaron Burr and presented testimony for the prosecution at his trial.



Oldest doc.pdf

We also have Miscellaneous Court Documents dating 1788 when we were still apart of the Mississippi Territory.

As Baldwin County's Archivist, what is your favorite part of the collection?

Oh my, that's hard! It's like trying to select a favorite child. One of my favorite collections is the Founding Families collection. This is a collection of all the families who lived in Baldwin County before 1920. There are documents to show families who settled here in the 1700s.

What is your biggest challenge as an archivist?

Documenting Baldwin County's pandemic experience has been challenging, especially with everything online and changing so fast. We need to continuously think about how to archive this time period while we are making history. We must ensure we have accurate records so that when people look back 100 years from now, they can see what we experienced, much like we've been able to study what things were like in Baldwin County over 200 years ago.