Research Tips

The categories below provide information about relevant resources in the ADAH collections, both physical and digital records. While much of this material is only available for use in the Research Room, many resources have been digitized and can be accessed online. Visit the Explore Our Collections page for links to the catalog, digital resources, and databases.

Unable to visit? Our staff will complete limited research on individual family members and specific topics. See the Submit a Research Request page for more information.

FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

Online Resources

- **1867 Voter Registration Books**
  The Second Reconstruction Act of March 23, 1867, required each military district to register all male citizens (21 years and older) to vote after they had taken an oath of loyalty to the United States. The 1867 Voter Registration Books are significant because they are among the first government documents to record African American males living in Alabama. These volumes are useful for providing county-of-residence information, but not all counties are represented. Check the digital collection to see which are available.

- **1875 Voter Registration Books**
  Calls for a new constitutional convention began days after the Democratic Party swept statewide elections in 1874. Within a month's time, a legislative committee submitted a proposal for a new convention, which called for the registration of qualified voters in advance of an August 1875 referendum on the subject. The 1875 Voter Registration Books were created during that period and, like our collection of 1867 volumes, are among the earliest state records documenting the names of formerly enslaved African American men. (See the digital collection list of available counties.)

- **Civil War Service Records Database**
  The Civil War Service Records Database provides information such about Civil War soldiers from Alabama. An individual may have multiple entries, which could include details such as county of enlistment, regiment number, and discharge information. When searching, start with minimal terms, such as the first and last name, or even just the last name—records may give first and middle initials instead of full names, and some entries include misspellings. (This is an excellent source to use in conjunction with Fold3, a military records database website. See below for more details.)

- **World War I Gold Star Files**
  After World War I, ADAH collected materials about service members from Alabama who died in the conflict, first identifying the them in the Official Bulletin (published by the U.S. Committee on Public Information) and then contacting their survivors for more information. Many responded, and their contributions were added to the department's "Gold Star" files, named after the service flags that families displayed in memory of the loved ones

they had lost. The [World War I Gold Star Files](#) digital collection consists of those records, which include details about each subject's service and death.

- **Digital Collections**
  The [ADAH Digital Collections](#) include selections of digitized materials from our archival collections, such as letters, diaries, Civil War regimental history files, military service records, and photographs.

On-Site Resources

- **Online Subscription Resources**
  These web resources are available at no charge to patrons visiting the Research Room:
  - **Ancestry.com**: state and federal census records, marriage records, Civil War pension records, and much more
  - **Fold3**: military records from every American involved conflict
  - **Newspapers.com**: keyword searchable digitized newspapers from all over the United States (a fantastic resource for obituaries, marriage notices, and military service mentions)
  - **HistoryGeo**: information about maps and land patents
  - **FamilySearch**: extended access to the free website (we are a Family Search Affiliate Library, which gives patrons access to select records that are unavailable from private accounts)

- **Genealogy Reference Books**
  Our book collection includes state, local, and county histories for Alabama and other states. Each of Alabama's 67 counties is represented. Though the number of books varies widely for each county, available resources may include newspaper abstracts, census abstracts, cemetery inventories, and indexes for marriages, wills, and other probate court records.

- **Local Government Records on Microfilm**
  Every county in Alabama is represented in this collection, though the types, dates, and amount of material vary by location. The earliest records predate statehood (1819) and the latest are from the 1950s. Search the [County Records on Microfilm Database](#) for available content. The following types of records are included:
  - Marriages
  - Deeds
  - Wills
  - Estate case files
  - Limited birth and death registers
  - Guardianship records (different from adoption records)

- **Federal & State Census Records**
  Working through census records can provide information about your ancestors, such as where they lived, how many children they had, what state they were born in, their parents' names, and more. The first federal census was in 1790 and is taken every ten years. Census indexes are available in the Research Room, and federal census records for every state and each decade through 1950 are available on Ancestry.com. Other relevant records include the Alabama state censuses of 1850, 1855, and 1866; the slave schedules of 1850 and 1860; agricultural censuses; and mortality schedules.

- **Private Manuscript Collections**
  Private records include correspondence, diaries, business records, scrapbooks, and photographs. These will likely be of limited use in genealogical research unless your family has donated a collection to ADAH, but you can search our [catalog](#) for available material.

- **State Government Records**
  Government records of potential use to family historians include state prison records, professional licensure files, and state and local official commissions registers. We also have a large collection of surname files that contain newspaper clippings and family history information, as well as the [Public Information Subject Files](#), which are arranged by subject, county, and military conflict.

- **Newspaper Collections**
Newspapers can be used to find obituaries, land and estate sales, and much more. ADAH has a large collection of general and subject-specific newspapers from all counties in the state. See the Newspapers Database for available titles and date ranges. While some of the papers are only available for use in the Research Room, many can also be accessed on Newspapers.com. This online resource, which allows users to search by keyword, date, and location, is available for free to patrons who visit ADAH.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

- **Digital Collections**
The ADAH Digital Collections include selections of digitized materials from our archival collections, such as photographs, maps, documents, publications, film, and military service records.

- **State Government Records**
The official historical records of Alabama state government are among the archival collections at ADAH. They include documents and publications related to the legislature; appellate and supreme courts; state agencies; constitutional officers; all the state's governors from 1819 to the present; and the Alabama Territory. (Some pre-statehood records are transcriptions from colonial archives and territorial governments.)

- **Private Manuscript Collections**
Private records include not only correspondence, diaries, scrapbooks, and business records, but also Alabama church records, city directories, school yearbooks, and publications and records of organizations.

- **Photographs, Maps, Posters, and Blueprints**
ADAH has a rich collection of visual materials depicting individuals, events, and locations from throughout the state's history. While many items can be found in the ADAH Digital Collections, much more is available for use in the Research Room. (Not all of these resources are represented in the catalog or Maps Database, so feel free to contact our staff if you don't find what you need.)

- **Newspapers**
ADAH has a large collection of general and subject-specific newspapers from all counties in the state. See the Newspapers Database for available titles and date ranges. While some of the papers are only available for use in the Research Room, many can also be accessed on Newspapers.com. This online resource, which allows users to search by keyword, date, and location, is available for free to patrons who visit ADAH.

- **Books and Serials**
Our book and serial collections focus on Alabama history at the state, county, and community levels, as well as general southern history. ADAH holds a large collection of historical, political, and cultural publications that are invaluable for research related to any aspect of the state of Alabama, the Civil War, and southern culture and events.

- **Military Records**
ADAH has a large collection of military records for various wars; among these are muster rolls, regimental histories, and pension applications from the Civil War, as well as the department's Gold Star Files that document Alabama servicemen who died in World War I. Many Alabama military records can be found online through subscription websites like Ancestry.com and Fold3, both of which are freely available in our Research Room. On-site researchers will also have access to printed copies of the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* and the Public Information Subject Files, which include a subset about "Alabamians at War" (1780-1980).

LEGAL OR LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

- **Alabama Supreme Court Case Files, 1820-1974**
  These original volumes of Alabama Supreme Court cases files may also contain records from the lower courts, such as briefs, summonses, motions, or depositions, as well as photographs, maps, drawings, and other exhibit material. The Alabama Supreme Court Database provides an index for material from 1820 to 1893, and selected case files from 1820 to 1877 are available in the digital collections. Contact the Alabama Supreme Court regarding cases heard after 1974 and all death penalty cases.

- **Alabama Court of Appeals Case Files, 1910-1990**
  Appeals case files are bound transcripts of cases that were tried in local circuit courts and then appealed. The Alabama Court of Appeals was established in 1911, and it was divided into criminal and civil jurisdictions in 1969. Therefore, cases from 1910 through 1969 are combined into one set of files, and cases after 1969 are divided between criminal and civil matters. For cases after 1990, contact the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals.

- **State Government Records**
  The official historical records of Alabama state government are among the archival collections at ADAH. They include documents and publications related to the legislature; appellate and supreme courts; state agencies; constitutional officers; all the state's governors from 1819 to the present. Items of particular interest to legislative researchers are the enrolled and engrossed acts of the Alabama legislature and copies of the Alabama codes from the 18th and 19th centuries.

- **Alabama Legislative Acts**
  All volumes of the state's legislative acts from 1818 through 1999 have been digitized and are available on the Internet Archive.

- **Alabama House and Senate Journals**
  The House and Senate journals from 1818 through 1901 have been digitized and uploaded to the Internet Archive. Printed volumes from the twentieth century are available in the Research Room, and the ADAH Electronic Records Collections include journals from more recent years.

- **Newspapers**
  Newspapers often include information about legal and legislative matters, such as articles discussing government actions, legislation, court cases, and important rulings. ADAH has a large collection of general and subject-specific newspapers from all counties in the state. See the Newspapers Database for available titles and date ranges. While some of the papers are only available for use in the Research Room, many can also be accessed on Newspapers.com. This searchable online resource, which includes titles from all over the United States, is available for free to patrons who visit ADAH.