



STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

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Steve Murray
DIRECTOR

July 14, 2023

Members of the Alabama Legislature
Via E-mail

Dear Legislators:

I am writing in regard to a June 15 history lecture at the Department of Archives and History, which has been cited as the motivation for proposed legislation to rescind the Archives' FY 2023 supplemental appropriation of \$5 million. This letter conveys details previously shared with several of you in conversation, provides an explanation for why the program was consistent with the mission of the Archives, and summarizes the intended uses of the supplemental appropriation.

The Archives respects the authority and responsibility of the Legislature to appropriate funds as you see fit. We hope you will make an informed decision, based on familiarity with the June 15 program and awareness of our agency's commitment to integrity and service in the promotion of evidence-based history.

On June 14, I spoke with nine legislators who called regarding the lecture scheduled to take place the next day. I shared the following four points of information during those conversations.

- Format:** The June 15 program, titled "Invisible No More: Alabama's LGBTQ+ History," was part of our monthly noontime lecture series called *Food for Thought*. For more than thirty years, the series has provided opportunities for the public to hear speakers on a wide array of topics in Alabama history. Attendees are welcome to bring a sack lunch with them, but the event is not a luncheon. The lecture is livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube, and a recording is available at <https://bit.ly/FFT2023JUNE>.
- Planning Process:** The 2023 *Food for Thought* series was planned beginning in the summer of 2022, when our public-programs staff created a proposed schedule of topics and speakers. I provided feedback on the draft and approved the final version before invitations were extended to speakers.
- Promotion and Audience:** The year's complete schedule is published each January in a press release and on the Archives website. Every month, a marketing email promoting upcoming events goes to a list of more than 16,000 recipients, including legislators. A reminder email goes out 24 to 48 hours before each *Food for Thought*. The series is promoted to general adult audiences and not to children.

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4. **Funding:** The only direct costs associated with the program were a speaker stipend and mileage reimbursement, both paid by a competitive grant from the Alabama Humanities Alliance using federal funds. State dollars pay for the operation of the building, the salaries of staff, and the costs associated with promotion—printing, email, the website, etc.

The program's content aligned with the agency's statutory mandate to pursue "the diffusion of knowledge in reference to the history and resources of the state" (Ala. Code §41-6-2). The lecture highlighted the contributions of a few LGBTQ Alabamians in their chosen pursuits and examined the early histories of LGBTQ organizations in Alabama through the records created by groups in Auburn, Tuscaloosa, and Birmingham starting in the early 1970s. It examined primary source documents to find what they reveal about the interests and motivations of groups that were active decades ago, and it discussed the limitations of historical evidence for understanding the lives of people in the past. This approach used basic tools of historical inquiry that can be applied to any topic, and which are routinely applied in *Food for Thought* presentations.

The 2023 schedule, for example, offers opportunities to hear about naturalist William Bartram's explorations through the Southeast in the late 1700s; college football fight songs; Alabama's state mammal, the black bear; the significance of musician Duane Allman's time in Muscle Shoals for shaping 1970s rock; the 31st Infantry Division in World War II; the excavation of an ancient canoe canal through the Fort Morgan peninsula; and the influence of family dynamics on white attitudes toward the Confederate war effort, to name a few. During these and other programs, our intent is to offer history, not indoctrination.

Finally, please allow me to share with you information on the intended uses of the supplemental appropriation made to the Archives. The earmark in the bill indicated that the \$5 million is to be used for "museum upgrades and/or property purchases." The museum upgrades include a multi-part project to enhance and expand our existing Museum of Alabama exhibits. The funds will support the redesign of our Native American content, the creation of a new military gallery to honor the service of Alabamians, the development of an all-new children's gallery, and technological and content updates to the decade-old *Alabama Voices* gallery. The property purchase will be to secure a site for the future construction of a preservation facility to house our growing collections and 21st-century functions such as digitization and the management of born-digital records. Additional information on the projects is provided in the attached flier.

We invite you to visit the Archives at your convenience to learn more about these projects and our commitment to serve everyone who calls Alabama home.

Respectfully,



Steve Murray
Director

Updates & Enhancements Ahead for the Museum of Alabama

The ADAH has launched a major capital project to expand and enhance the Museum of Alabama, the state history museum located at the ADAH in Montgomery. Planning for this new phase of work began in 2022, and installation is scheduled to begin in mid-2025. New exhibits will open in early 2026, when the agency will mark its 125th anniversary of service to the state and the 250th anniversary of the founding of the nation.

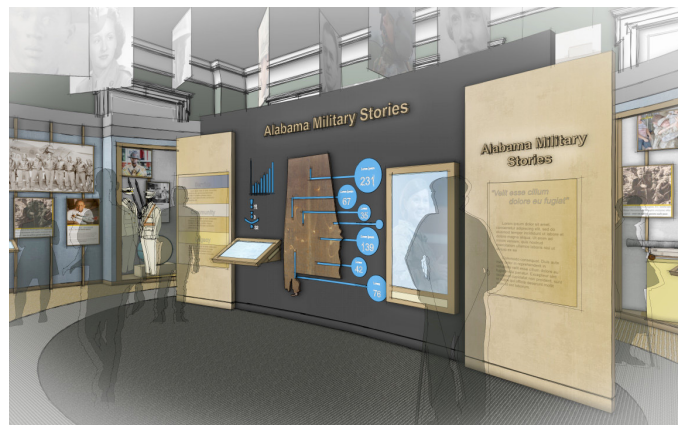
Funding for the project is provided by a 2023 supplemental appropriation by the Legislature, to be matched with support from the Alabama Archives and History Foundation.

New Children's Gallery

A reimagined space will make Alabama's history fun, engaging, and relevant for children ages 2 to 10. The gallery will demonstrate that they are a valued part of our state's story and that we believe in the contributions they can make to Alabama.

Flexible learning stations will introduce age-appropriate topics in Alabama history with a focus on engaging history and civics concepts through play.

The gallery will serve as a demonstration space for early childhood educators.



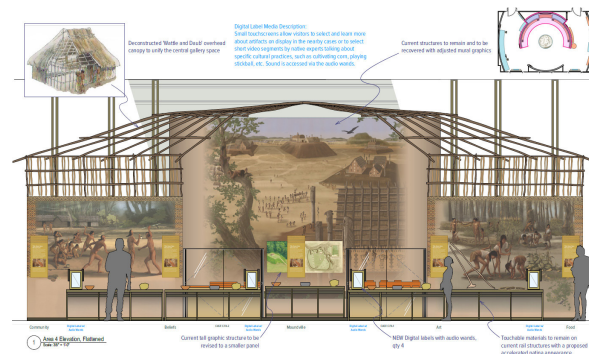
New Exhibit: *Alabama Military Stories*

This exhibit will honor the experiences of Alabamians in military service during war and peacetime, and will explore the effects of service on their lives and communities.

The purpose of the exhibit is to deepen visitors' understanding of the courage and cost that come with answering the call of duty.

New Exhibit: *First Peoples of Alabama*

A new presentation of the history of Alabama's first peoples will center and highlight Native American perspectives, creating a space where the stories of Alabama's indigenous people are told respectfully, accurately, and in an engaging way.



Updated Exhibit: *Alabama Voices*

Updates to the Museum of Alabama's ten-year-old centerpiece exhibit will introduce additional stories of Alabama's contributions to the American experience and incorporate new research. These enhancements will take advantage of new technology to better serve the evolving learning styles of visitors.

Planning Underway for New Preservation Facility

As collections and services of the ADAH continue to grow, the current building's capacity is rapidly nearing its limit. Periodic expansion of the agency's facilities has been necessary throughout our history, with building projects being completed in 1907, 1940, 1974, and 2005. We are again at the point of requiring additional, environmentally sound storage capacity as well as new space for 21st-century functions such as digitization and the management of electronic records.

A functional assessment begun in 2022 is nearing completion and will serve as a guide for planning the new facility. Funding to purchase a site for future construction was provided by a 2023 supplemental appropriation by the Legislature.



(Left) The building's best records storage area in the 2005 wing has no available space for collections growth.



(Right) Storage conditions in older portions of the building, including this space used for newspapers, are substandard.



(Left) The room dedicated to the ADAH's superb textiles collection, including quilts, flags, and clothing, is at maximum capacity and does not meet best-practices standards for environmental control.

Goals for A New Preservation Facility:

- Collections storage space to accommodate the next 25 years of growth
- Storage for large museum artifacts
- Appropriate environmental controls for the long-term preservation of fragile materials, including the ADAH's rapidly growing audiovisual collection
- An updated conservation lab
- Office and meeting space for collections and records management staff