

The Alabama Vision

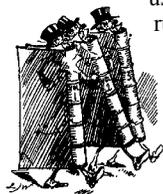
by **Sue O. Medina** (Director, Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, c/o Alabama Commission on Higher Education, 100 North Union Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104; Phone: 334-242-2211) <sue.medina@ache.alabama.gov>

Library users move easily among their communities' libraries, seeking information regardless of the "type of library" available to them. No single library or type of library can meet all the needs of its users.

Alabama was among the first states to recognize this fact and its implications — and to bring its libraries together to address these issues. The **Network of Alabama Academic Libraries** was an early champion of collaboration among libraries and an eager adopter of networking technology.

NAAL — Making Published Content Available to Academic Libraries

NAAL (<http://www.ache.state.al.us/NAAL>) became one of the first statewide consortia to license the newly available online databases for all its members. This produced a marked improvement in access for the users of academic libraries (especially those in smaller, rural, or less-well funded schools) — but we knew that users of public libraries also needed this content.



NAAL was careful to negotiate access for "walk-in" users in its contracts and libraries' "open door" policies resulted in walk-in community users discovering online resources available through nearby academic libraries. Increasingly, though, users requested remote access. Our contracts did not allow this for non-academic users — nor could we possibly afford the costs of contracts which did. Academic library databases are denied to anyone not an "authorized user."

So NAAL went to the next step and envisioned a "virtual library" to serve all Alabamians.

Alabama Virtual Library — (www.avl.lib.al.us) Information for All Citizens of Alabama

The concept of a statewide virtual library led NAAL to foster new partnerships among public school systems, colleges, and public libraries to use technology to strengthen information resources available for all Alabamians. The **Alabama Legislature** responded to NAAL's statewide advocacy campaign by initially appropriating \$3,000,000 — and continuing annual incremented appropriations for an "**Alabama Virtual Library**". This simple line item in the FY2000 budget conveyed ac-

ceptance of three principles for the provision of information needed by Alabama's students and citizens.

- **Equity:** every student, teacher, and citizen should have online access to core information needed for instruction, research, and life-long learning
- **Excellence:** information should be accurate, scholarly, and current
- **Economy:** significant savings could be achieved by providing information on a statewide basis.



The virtual library concept was an ideal merger of aspirations to improve information resources supporting education in the context of the reality of limited funding for libraries, and the emergence of online information products. It also marked a change in political strategy for libraries. Instead of competing among themselves for limited state funds, five state agencies agreed to cooperatively operate a "new" library, one not physically owned by an individual library or educational sector but one that is always available to library users, regardless of their "type of library" affiliation.

Since its initial funding, the **AVL** has emerged as an essential portal for access to information for K-12, the higher education community, and the public. In 2008, the **AVL** offers over 80 databases from major vendors including **Gale**, **EBSCO**, **OCLC Oxford University Press**, **ProQuest**, and **SIRS**. In addition, NAAL is creating **Alabama Mosaic**, an image and full text database with content related to Alabama history. This database is being developed to help support state standards for the study of Alabama history in public schools. The State appropriation is now slightly more than four million dollars and pays for the commercial databases.

Residents of Alabama can obtain an **AVL Card** from their local public libraries that assigns a personal identification number for remote access to the databases. The **AVL Card** is valid for three years and can be renewed.

Alabama Mosaic — Enriching the Study of Alabama History

Unfortunately, commercial databases, created and marketed for national markets, rarely include material of regional or local interest. These products, most often created by aggregating secondary source materials as it is published, offer few full text historical materials or images older than the final quarter of the last century. Despite the richness of these electronic collections, searches of commercial databases in the **AVL** do not generally yield much information about Alabama's history and culture.

In 2001, the **Institute of Museum and Library Services** funded NAAL to demonstrate a model for statewide collaboration to make unique historical treasures from Alabama's archives, libraries, museums, and other repositories electronically accessible to Alabama residents as well as students and scholars around the world. During the three-year **IMLS** project, academic librarians supported training for all types of cultural heritage repositories to plan, implement, and complete digitization projects. **Auburn University**, a member of NAAL, hosts the central site for **Alabama Mosaic** (<http://www.alabamamosaic.org>). This site supports a shared digital file management system (**ContentDM**) and a search engine (**ContentDM MultiSite Server**). **Alabama Mosaic** hosts both the digital files and their associated metadata for any repository that does not have its own digital file management system.

Any repository with significant treasures related to Alabama can contribute digital resources to **Alabama Mosaic**. Academic libraries are digitizing unique materials from their special collections, including documents, images, recordings and videos to enrich the study of Alabama. The **Alabama Department of Archives and History**, the nation's first state-funded archive, is contributing materials from its

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more than 100 years of collecting. In addition, **Birmingham Public Library** and **Huntsville-Madison County Public Library** are adding significant materials detailing the history of their communities.

Alabama Mosaic also saw it as part of its state-mission to help individuals preserve historical objects. The project sponsored a one-day workshop for two public libraries that focused on helping individuals learn how to conserve their own historical materials. The workshop, **Protecting Your Treasures@The Library**, reviewed caring for historical paper, primarily photographs and documents such as letters, and caring for fabrics. Participants could learn how to scan items so they could share their family histories but avoid handling fragile originals. Both libraries provided public access scanners for community users.

The growing collections are testimony of the treasures distributed throughout Alabama and preserved in our cultural heritage institutions. Unfortunately, **Alabama Mosaic** does not have funding to assist a contributor in putting materials online; and the Alabama public libraries have very limited or no funding from other sources to develop a digital library program.

Alabama Digital Preservation Network — Assuring Long-term Access for Digital Assets

Having built **Alabama Mosaic**, we need to know that its collections are safely archived. Academic librarians strongly believe that the long-term preservation of digital assets is an essential part of digital collection building. Many smaller repositories in Alabama tend to use their limited funds to make their content accessible online, and tend to defer strategies for long-term preservation of the digital content they create locally. Teaching staff in these repositories to make preservation a priority is a challenge because there are no new funds to pay for preservation solutions.

Alabama Mosaic focused on accepting presentation files for public access and did not include a strategy to archive digital files for its contributors. In planning **Alabama Mosaic**, **NAAL** stipulated that contributors should store original unaltered scans of their digital resources in archival conditions, but did not offer an archival solution.

Unfortunately, some digital projects eagerly make content publicly available online, but fail to develop and implement preservation strategies. Small repositories often lack trained staff to manage long-term preservation of digital collections, lack access to suitable offsite archives, and lack funds to pay for long-term storage. At best, the projects saved a copy of locally created digital files to a CD/DVD and kept them somewhere in the library.

Katrina, Rita as a Learning Experience: Creating ADPNet

The combined damage by **Hurricanes**

against the grain people profile

Director, Network of Alabama Academic Libraries
P. O. Box 302000, Montgomery, AL 36130-2000
Phone: (334) 242-2211
<sue.medina@ache.alabama.gov>

Sue O. Medina

BORN & LIVED: Although I grew up in Florida, once I found Alabama, I claimed it as home. It is a lovely state filled with wonderful people. It has a wealth of natural beauty above ground — and if you have any interest in spelunking, it is phenomenally beautiful underground.

EDUCATION: Ph.D. in Library Science from **Florida State University**. My bachelor's degree is in history, and my personal reading choice is medieval Central Asian history. **Genghis Khan** is my leadership role model! My interest is the role played by the Mongols in the transfer of knowledge from East to West and vice-versa.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Advocating change in the delivery of library resources and services. I left working in a "real" library when I was appointed "library planner" for a regional planning commission. I worked with city and counties to strengthen public libraries in ten very poor Alabama counties. Eventually, I became director of the **Network of Alabama Academic Libraries**, a consortium of public and private academic institutions in Alabama. The library directors who make up **NAAL** share a statewide vision that has significantly improved academic libraries in Alabama — and their commitment to improving services for every student make working for **NAAL** a daily pleasure.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: I read a lot. I quilt a little — but nothing like my award-winning quilting husband (who learned to quilt when he retired). I also make jewelry and teach working with gemstone beads for our local gem and mineral society. I belong to the **Alabama Branch of the Taoist Tai Chi Society of the USA** — we seem to have lots of librarians among our members so our sessions are often as much about books as exercise.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Working* (Studs Terkel); *The Empire of the Steppes; A History of Central Asia* (Rene Grousset); anything by several Southern women writers — it is a long list. I belong to a book discussion group and we read a book a month — whether I like the book or not! 🌿

Katrina and Rita resulted in the worst natural disaster in the U. S. history. The widespread devastation left in its wake changed attitudes toward preservation and recovery. Throughout the years, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and fires have destroyed libraries and ruined collections throughout Alabama, but on scale much smaller than **Katrina and Rita**.

In 2007, the **Institute of Museum and Library services** awarded **NAAL** a two-year grant to develop a distributed, low-cost model for the long-term archival preservation of locally-created digital resources. Six academic libraries and the **Alabama Department of Archives and History** host **LOCKSS** www.lockss.org servers for the **Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet)**. **LOCKSS** is an effective and low-cost solution to prevent loss of digital assets through physical damage from natural events, human intervention or error, or just the ravages of time. While **LOCKSS** was created to archive commercial electronic journals, **ADPNet** has adapted **LOCKSS** for a private network. Its nodes communicate with each other but are not visible to the already established **LOCKSS** network used for e-journals.

Digital content can be archived in **ADPNet**

in one of two ways. The first is to allow the **ADPNet** servers to crawl the library's Web server and harvest "archival units" designated by the library for storage. Recently, **Auburn University Libraries** and **LOCKSS** staff developed a way for collections stored in **ContentDM** to be harvested directly from **ContentDM** servers. This allows a library to archive its full-resolution file and its presentation file along with the associated metadata.

NAAL members have planned **ADPNet** to be a trusted, long-term, archival storage facility for Alabama repositories of different types and sizes. Digital files stored in **ADPNet** do not need to relate to Alabama history and presentation copies do not need to be part of **Alabama Mosaic**. However, the presentation copies of archived files must be freely available to the public.

ADPNet has concluded its first project year, and all seven **LOCKSS** nodes are fully operational. In year two, **ADPNet** will accept content from other Alabama repositories and hopefully the first contributors will be the contributors to **Alabama Mosaic**.

Our greatest wish is that none of the files stored in **ADPNet** will ever be needed to restore lost content. 🌿