Annual Report, 2025-2026

The Center for Historic Preservation
Middle Tennessee State University



Figure 1: Center Staff at Dr. Carroll Van West's Retirement Reception, June 2026. Courtesy of James Cessna, MTSU Creative and Visual Services.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

CHP MTSU Center for Historic Preservation
Scholars • Partners • Leaders

July 2025-June 2026

Origins and Background

The Center for Historic Preservation was established in 1984 as MTSU's first Center of Excellence and one of the nine original centers at the Tennessee Board of Regents universities. One of its first projects, the Tennessee Century Farms Program partnership with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, has been foundational to many other statewide initiatives. In 1989, the CHP received accomplished center status and in 1991 it became a full-time research and public service institute while continuing to shape MTSU academic programs by supporting and directing undergraduate and graduate students in research and experiential learning opportunities.

In 2001, the Center became the administrator of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (TCWNHA), a partnership unit of the National Park Service, and ten years later additional agreements with the National Park Service led to substantial work on the National Historic Trails program. In 2008, the Center took on the Tennessee administration of Teaching with Primary Sources, a program of the Library of Congress, and provided Tennessee educators with primary source-centered workshops and materials. In 2013 Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam appointed Center director Dr. Carroll Van West as the Tennessee State Historian. In 2025, the Library of Congress designated the Center as the program’s Southern Region, extending its service to educators in eight states.

Center programs and projects strongly support the general legislative mandates implemented by state officials when they created Centers of Excellence in 1984. These are: (1) utilize present educational resources more effectively to achieve a genuine excellence in a specific field; (2) support the economic development of the state; (3) enhance the intellectual, cultural, and social climate of Tennessee citizens; (4) improve the research base of the state; and, (5) encourage institutions to increase support for educational and research activities from external sources. The Center meets these mandates through projects and programs that focus on the heritage development--the identification, research, preservation, interpretation, and promotion--of our historic environment. Through its varied resources, and its partnerships at local, state, and national levels, the Center responds to the requests, needs, and concerns of communities, individuals, agencies, and organizations, both governmental and not-for-profit, working towards historic preservation goals.

Working within state, regional, and national partnerships, the Center for Historic Preservation focuses its efforts on heritage area development, rural preservation, heritage education, and heritage tourism. Consistent with the MTSU Academic Master Plan to enhance research and public service, the Center supports efforts to improve the education and quality of life for all Tennesseans. The Center enhances citizens’ sense

of place, pride, and identity through the interpretation and preservation of the historic sites, landscapes, and historical narratives that comprise the Tennessee experience.

To complement the MTSU Academic Master Plan's goals, the Center for Historic Preservation uses multiple community-centered projects to teach selected courses in the History Department. It provides crucial teaching and funding for the PhD in Public History. The Center is a primary conduit for training and placement of MA students in public history and plays a significant role in directing MA theses and PhD dissertations in that program. By offering graduate research assistantships in addition to internships and other opportunities for both undergraduates and graduates, the CHP provides multidisciplinary and applied working experiences and fosters a research culture for faculty, staff, and students.



Figure 2: Dr. West sorting slides during his early years at the Center.

On June 30, 2026, the last day of the period covered by this annual report, Dr. Carroll Van West retired after 41 years at MTSU, including 24 years as director of the Center. He is now an emeritus professor. By the time he retired, he had directed close to 130 M.A. theses, 2 D.A. dissertations, and almost 50 doctoral dissertations. As director, West took the Center to an unprecedented level of national outreach and prominence. He nurtured partnerships with the National Park Service and the Library of Congress that became integral to the Center's work and, especially, its ability to fund and mentor graduate students. Dr. Tiffany Momon, a former graduate student of Dr. West's and a former graduate research assistant at the Center, succeeded Dr. West as the third director of the Center on July 1, 2026.



Figure 3: Dr. West and Dr. Momon at Colonial Williamsburg in February 2026.

Major Projects and Accomplishments, 2025-2026

1. ***Preparing Students for Professional Success***

The Center prides itself on preparing MTSU students to gain the experience they need for their careers. Graduate Research Assistants from the Center upon graduation are always nationally competitive and work for history and design firms, government agencies, non-profits, and colleges and universities. They create their own success, but the Center provides an invaluable platform for their training, especially in our

community-anchored programs across Tennessee, the South, and Midwest. Center graduates extend our message of reciprocal community engagement nationwide.

Associate Director Dr. Torren Gatson led his Essentials in Museum Management class in two interpretive projects. The Fall 2025 class created wayside panels for Johnsonville State Park in Humphreys County. The Spring 2026 class created a Historic Murfreesboro Interpretive Panel at the Heritage Center in downtown Murfreesboro. Along with Dr. West and Fieldwork Manager Savannah Grandey Knies, Dr. Gatson was also a mentor to CHP graduate research assistant Blaine Howard, who was the lead researcher and writer on the **Seay's Chapel School Heritage Development Plan.** Howard looked into the National Register eligibility of this African American school for members of the Ashworth Glade community of Wilson County. The report outlined the significance of Seay's Chapel School within the context of African American education and community-building, documented Pitman Cemetery as a burial ground connected to Ashworth Glade families, offered suggestions for the adaptive reuse of the site, and identified the preservation needs of the Seay's Chapel school building. GRAs Hannah Walton and Nicki Messer are now working on the NR nomination for the school.

Research Professor Dr. Stacey Graham chaired two Master's thesis committees that came to successful fruition for the Public History graduate program – one in December 2025 (Richard Emory) and another in May 2026 (Bobby Cooley).

Dr. Graham led students in the Fall 2025 Essentials in Historic Preservation and Cultural Resource Management course in two community-based projects: one on the history, commemoration, and preservation of **Lytle Cemetery in Rutherford County**, in partnership with the local chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution; and another that involved a neighborhood architectural survey with interpretive suggestions for the **Sylvan Park Neighborhood Association in Davidson County**. Both reports started as class assignments and were amended with further research and revisions by CHP GRAs.

Dr. Graham also led students in the Spring 2026 Seminar in Historic Preservation course in two community-based projects, both in Bedford County: one for history and preservation suggestions for the **New Hope Baptist Church and Cemetery** (a property connected to the CHP's 2024 Chapman-Singleton project); another on the history, preservation issues, and interpretive suggestions for the **Old Rock Jail**, at the request of the Bedford County archivist. Both reports started as class assignments and are currently being revised with further research by CHP GRAs from that class.



Figure 4: Fall 2025 Cemetery Workshop at Evergreen Cemetery in Murfreesboro.

To train undergraduate students at MTSU and graduate students in the Public History program in best practices in cemetery documentation and preservation, Dr. Graham conducted **the third student-focused cemetery workshop in October 2025**. This one took place in **the historic African American section of Evergreen Cemetery in Murfreesboro**.

Graduate Research Assistants Amelia Blakely and Liz Nahach prepared the report **Sanders Grove School, Marshall County, Tennessee: History and Building Documentation** under the supervision of Dr. Stacey Graham and Assistant Director Dr. Antoinette van Zelm. The report contains the history of the Sanders Grove School (completed by 1898) and rural education in Marshall County, a description of the property, an assessment of the current condition of the building, and preservation recommendations.

In the spring of 2026, staff and students began installing interpretation in the 1937 National Register-listed **Carothers House,** a limestone-clad farmhouse located in Franklin and owned by the city's Parks and Recreation Department. This followed up on the Center's 2020 report on the Carothers Farm, which involved several graduate research assistants.



Figure 5: Dr. Torren Gatson with GRAs Blaine Howard and Paige Hurley at the Carothers House in Franklin.

TCWNHA Manager Laura Holder and graduate research assistants Paige Hurley, Aisha Karamustafic, Elizabeth Nahach, and Rhyder Cowart continued to manage the **Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County**, a free visitor orientation and museum/heritage center which interprets the 1862 Battle of Murfreesboro, the impacts of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and other facets of the county's history.

Finally, several past graduate research assistants, as well as current staff, contributed research to Dr. West's ***The United States and World War II: Triumphs and Trials on the Home Front, A National Park Service Handbook*** (2026). This fully illustrated book looks at the "miracle of production" that characterized the home front and delves into all aspects of citizen participation in the war effort.

2. *Assisting Rural Communities in the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area*

The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area tells the whole story of America's greatest challenge, 1860-1875--the powerful stories of vicious warfare, the demands of home front and occupation, the freedom of emancipation, and the legacies of Reconstruction. This year, TCWNHA staff and students provided leadership to organizations statewide, supporting education, interpretation, preservation, and economic development. Leveraging federal, state, local, and private funding, we empowered communities and individuals to serve as good stewards of their historic places and stories through our free Professional Services and Outreach support, as well as our Collaborative Partnerships matching grants for more extensive projects.



Figure 6: GRA Stephen Simmons conducting a cemetery survey in Cannon County.

The **Cannon County Cemetery Survey** continues to record that rural county's historic cemeteries, many of which predate the Civil War or contain Civil War veteran graves. At a time of increased residential and commercial development pushing westward across the county, the survey is raising awareness about the existence and significance of historic cemeteries and provides valuable information about early settlement patterns and Union and Confederate loyalties during the Civil War. To date, Savannah Grandey Knies and GRA Stephen Simmons have surveyed 156 of the 217 historic cemeteries believed to still exist.

Members of the Morrison community in Warren County sought assistance in learning more about two historic landmarks, the c. 1810 **Hanlan House** and the c. 1850 **Hannah Highland School**. Savannah Grandey Knies and Stephen Simmons conducted fieldwork in the summer of 2025. Simmons then worked with Warren County historian Ann Brown and members of the Morrison community to compile a history of both buildings.

Dr. Graham held the **Spring 2026 CHP Cemetery Preservation Workshop in the New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery in Bedford County** for interested community members and MTSU students. This cemetery began as a church-centered graveyard for the early 19th-century white settler community and expanded to the side with what is most likely a section for enslaved burials. On the other side of the unmarked burials is the section for the African American descendants of the people who had worked on the Chapman-Singleton plantation, dating from the late 19th century to the 21st.

3. Historic Preservation in Tennessee's Cities

At the request of the property owner, Researcher Amy NeeSmith and Savannah Grandey Knies researched **Idler's Retreat**, a circa-1866 Greek Revival and Italianate style home located in Smyrna, Tennessee. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004 for its architectural significance, the building warranted further research, which uncovered the history of its first owner, Judge Joseph Rice Dillin. He was a Union political appointee during the Civil War and a supporter of local Black efforts for civil rights and education during Reconstruction. The report chronicles the house's history through the twentieth century.

In October 2025, Preservation Assistant Dr. Amanda McCrary Smith began researching the history of the Burroughs family in Warren and White counties. She also collected documentation on the **Thomas F. Burroughs House** in McMinnville, Tennessee, for a submission to the Tennessee Historical Commission (THC). In August of 2026, THC determined that the Burroughs House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. Graduate student Nikki Messer is currently working on the National Register nomination form.



Figure 7: The Sylvan Park Neighborhood in Nashville.

The **Sylvan Park History and Architectural Survey**, which is currently undergoing final revisions after consultation with the neighborhood association, was a product created by graduate students in the Public History program, with significant contributions by CHP GRA Paige Hurley. The survey was requested by the neighborhood association to help educate new and potential neighbors about the historic significance and character of the neighborhood and the architectural styles represented by decades of houses reflecting early suburban development in late 19th/early 20th-century Nashville. The goal is to raise the appreciation for historic features and provide groundwork for future efforts by the neighborhood association to protect this area from unchecked development that is incompatible with the neighborhood's historic character.

TCWNHA staff and students completed a church history and adaptive reuse recommendations for the **Lawrenceburg Cumberland Presbyterian Church**, which has a circa-1851 sanctuary and twentieth-century additions. Antoinette van Zelm and Laura Holder, with graduate students Joshua Brown and Paige Hurley, worked with local partners, including the Center's former Assistant Director Caneta Hankins and former Graduate Research Assistant Ashley Armstrong, now the Lawrence County archivist. Also in Middle Tennessee, we created an assessment of the **Hermitage Slave Cemetery** to assist with recommendations for the recently discovered enslaved cemetery on President Andrew Jackson's Hermitage property outside of Nashville. In East Tennessee, Heritage Area staff produced a heritage assessment plan for **Hackney Chapel AME Zion Church**, located in Lenoir City. The plan evaluated the National Register-listed church's condition and provided preservation recommendations and potential grant opportunities.



Figure 8: Hackney Chapel AME Zion Church, Lenoir City.

Through its Collaborative Partnerships program, which provides matching grant funds for organizations, local governments, and non-profits, the Heritage Area supported projects including interpretive tours, exhibits, educational materials, and preservation planning. In 2025-2026, these projects included ground penetrating radar surveys at both the National Register-listed **Parker's Crossroads Battlefield** and the National Register-listed **Johnsonville State Historic Park**; "East Tennessee 1863," the **East Tennessee Historical Society's free, multi-day Civil War scholarly symposium**; and **Historic Belmont Mansion's multi-panel exhibit** that explores the stories of the enslaved and free Black people who worked in the house and on the grounds of Belmont Mansion, in addition to the immigrant workers at the house, which was the Nashville home of Adelicia Acklen.

4. *Historic Preservation Across Rural Tennessee*



Figure 9: Dr. West signing books at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum, Nashville.

2025-2026 was a big year for the Tennessee Century Farms Program, as it celebrated its 50th year! The major accomplishment was Dr. West's publication of ***Tennessee's Frontier Century Farms: An Enduring Legacy of Family, Farming, and Community***, funded by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Center staff and students contributed to the book by helping to verify all of the current Tennessee Century Farms, some of which have been in the program for the entire 50 years. The illustrated book contains histories of the oldest farms in Tennessee and is a follow-up to Dr. West's *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective* (1986). The book's debut took place at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum at the Ellington Agricultural Center in early June, where Century Farm families gathered to receive a book and have it signed by Dr. West.

Another milestone was the publication of **Lasting Legacies: African American Century Farms in Tennessee**, an illustrated brochure highlighting the resilient and determined stories of 15 African American-owned farms founded between 1870 and 1918 that have remained active and in the same families for 100 years or more. The brochure, written by former Graduate Research Assistant Abigail Coomes with assistance from Dr. West and Dr. van Zelm, is already in its second printing.

In 2025-2026, the **Tennessee Century Farms Program** continued to certify new farms, with a total of 72 added to the program. Led by Dr. van Zelm and Administrative Assistant Krystal Marin, the program remained a thriving part of the Center's outreach across the state. Facebook posts welcoming the newly certified farms received many "likes" and generated comments that provided additional insights into local communities and farm families.

Since October 2025, when Dr. Amanda McCrary Smith joined our staff, she answered **seventeen inquiries from community members** requesting project assistance from the CHP. She traveled to **eight sites across the state** to meet with property owners in order to assess the preliminary history of the sites and to determine the unique historic preservation needs of each community partner.

Savannah Grandey Knies and MA student Liz Nahach successfully listed the 1922 **Bank of Auburn** building in Auburntown, Tennessee, in the National Register. The building is significant for its restrained Classical Revival style and its role in the economy of Auburntown, a once-bustling hamlet in Cannon County. In preparing the nomination, Knies and Nahach conducted fieldwork throughout the Eastern Highland Rim to identify comparable examples of Classical Revival buildings in small town settings.



Figure 10: Center students at the Bank of Liberty during fieldwork for the Bank of Auburn National Register project.

Dr. Graham researched and identified the most likely location for a displaced tombstone that had been in CHP storage for years. Working with the **DeKalb County Historical Society**, she received permission and encouragement to reinstate the tombstone in the identified location. She worked with the concrete lab manager at **MTSU's School of Concrete and Construction Management**, along with CHP GRAs, to create a concrete base to fit the tombstone, and prepare both pieces for attachment and erection on site. The DCHS purchased the repair kit and participated, along with a descendant, in the repair.

A new project about rural life and growth got started early in 2026. At the request of the **Middle Tennessee Electric Membership Corporation** (MTE) Dr. van Zelm and former Graduate Research Assistant Amelia Blakely began researching the history of rural electrification and the development of rural electric cooperatives during the 1930s. Their research will result in a history of MTE for its 90th anniversary.

5. ***Assisting Tennessee 250***

Dr. West gave multiple presentations for the Semiquincentennial. He spoke at **250th events** at the **MTSU Honors College, Traveler's Rest in Nashville, the U.S. State Department (virtually), and the Library of Congress's TPS Consortium meeting** in Montgomery, Alabama. Dr. Antoinette van Zelm presented on Revolutionary-era women in Tennessee at **Linebaugh Library's America 250 Lecture Series** in Murfreesboro. In addition, both West and van Zelm contributed articles to the special **Semiquincentennial double issue** of the ***East Tennessee History Journal*.**

The **Lytle Cemetery History and Preservation Assessment** provides a history of the people buried in this pioneer Murfreesboro cemetery, as well as a narrative of its history of decades-long commemoration by community groups. It concludes with tombstone documentation and preservation suggestions. Capt. William Lytle was a Revolutionary War veteran who sold the original plot of land for the establishment of the City of Murfreesboro in 1811. Furthermore, Dr. Graham participated in the planning of a

tombstone repair workshop on site, sponsored by the Stones River National Battlefield and the Campaign for Historic Trades. She also participated in the workshop itself, along with a chosen graduate student from the Public History program.



Figure 11: This 250th brochure is available at the Heritage Center.

To commemorate America 250, Laura Holder and Paige Hurley produced ***Celebrating America 250: Rutherford County***, a free tour brochure that shares stories of Rutherford County's Revolutionary War sites, citizens, and experiences.

TN 250TH Teacher Institutes

At the request of the Tennessee Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial, the Discover Tennessee History Collaborative, which includes the Tennessee State Museum, the Tennessee State Library and Archives, the Tennessee Historical Society, Tennessee State Parks, the East Tennessee Historical Society, and the Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region at MTSU, organized **the first of three teacher institutes as part of the larger Tennessee 250 educational programming**.

The Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region team participated in the first summer institute in the summer of 2025. The first institute served fifty educators from across Tennessee and directly collaborated with partners spanning the state and reflecting various disciplines within the public history field. The **2025 Institute was held in East Tennessee at the Sycamore Shoals Historic State Park** and included site visits for attendees to the Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site and the Sabine Hills State Historic Site. In addition to the site visits, the three-day institute featured speakers and lecturers highlighting the Indigenous tribes in the region, Tennessee's path to statehood, and frontier life for settlers. Teachers were encouraged to collaborate with one another to address the content presented and tackle educational strategies to curate curriculum for the time period discussed. The second institute is planned to take place in July 2026 in Middle Tennessee, and the third will be held in the summer of 2027 in West Tennessee.

6. Historic Preservation for Nationally Significant Southern Places

North Carolina

Work continued on the National Register of Historic Places nomination for **Pine Forest Cemetery in Wilmington, North Carolina**. Dr. West and Savannah Grandey Knies worked with the cemetery's board of directors; faculty at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington; and the state's historic preservation office to complete the nomination, which will go before the state's NRHP advisory board in early 2027. The

circa-1860 cemetery is significant as the city's Black burial ground for more than a century, as well as its association with the 1898 coup d' état and massacre that occurred in Wilmington.

Georgia

In August 2024, the Center entered into an agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation to develop a **Trail of Tears historic context for Cherokee and Forsyth counties** in Georgia. This multi-year project includes research, field survey, and the development of a final historic context document. After research visits to the Cherokee County History Center, Funk Heritage Center, and the Historical Society of Cumming/Forsyth County, CHP Programs Manager Amy Kostine and Savannah Grandey Knies completed Phase 1 of the project in the fall of 2025 and subsequently worked on Phase 2 over the last year with additional archival visits and field survey.

Missouri



Figure 12: Remember the Removal bike riders reading the new interpretive signage at Steelville Community Park. Courtesy of Jennifer Whitson.

In October 2024, the Steelville Trail of Tears Remembrance Committee reached out to Amy Kostine to help develop exterior **exhibits for Steelville Community Park**, a certified site on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail in Crawford County, Missouri. The Center had worked on several other trail projects in this area in the past and teamed up with the National Trails Office of the National Park Service and the Trail of Tears Remembrance Committee on this new project. Together, they developed four upright and wayside exhibits to interpret the park's history with the Cherokee Removal. These new exhibit panels, funded by a grant from Impact 100 Crawford County, were installed in May 2026, just in time for the Remember the Removal bike riders from the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to see them while they passed through the area on their annual bike ride to commemorate the Trail of Tears.

Kentucky and Tennessee

The Water Route of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is part of the rich history of **Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area** (LBL). Funding to draft, design, and fabricate eleven interpretive panels related to the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail at LBL was allocated to the Center through the National Park Service's Connect Trails to Parks funding course and the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. These panels will be installed at five of the most highly visited sites at LBL: Golden Pond Visitor Center, Hillman Ferry Campground, Fenton Hike and Bike Path, Turkey Bay Off-Highway Vehicle Area, and Piney Campground.

As part of the project, the signage will include **original commissioned artwork**. This year, Amy Kostine worked with artists Donald Corpier Starr (Cherokee Nation), BJ Foreman (Cherokee Nation), Mary Lupton (Cherokee Nation), and Haley Atsei Cooper (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) to create six new pieces of artwork for the exhibit panels. The CHP looks forward to continuing its work on this collaborative project over the next year.

In addition to working on exhibits for LBL, the Center is involved in two more projects to expand interpretation on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. The Center has worked closely with **Townsend Cultural Center** in Franklin County, Tennessee, over the years, creating a Heritage Development Plan for the building in 2019, exhibits in 2020 and 2023, listing the property in the National Register of Historic Places in 2024, and most recently creating a brochure for them. The Townsend Cultural Center reached out to the Center for help in developing 5-6 new retractable banner stand exhibit panels focusing on the history of the Cherokee Trail of Tears. Ashli Townsend, an MTSU MA student, is currently working on drafting those exhibit panels.



Figure 13: Center program manager Amy Kostine (center) and GRA Liz Nahach (left), working with partners at the Brainerd Mission Cemetery in Hamilton County.

The Tennessee Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association and the Brainerd Mission Cemetery Committee of the Chattanooga Regent's Council of the Tennessee Society Daughters of the American Revolution (TSDAR) also contacted the Center for Historic Preservation for assistance with the development of new **exhibit panels for an existing kiosk at Brainerd Mission Cemetery** in Hamilton County, Tennessee. Brainerd Mission Cemetery is a certified site on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail and the only extant component of Brainerd Mission. Last year, CHP GRA Elizabeth Nahach gathered an extensive amount of research on the cemetery's history, and over the next year, new CHP GRA Rose Doyle will work on drafting the exhibit panels.

7. Assisting Tennessee Educators Across the South

In September 2024, the U.S. Forest Service entered into an agreement with the Center to develop **educational materials** related to the history of the **Trail of Tears/Unicoi Turnpike in the Cherokee National Forest**. The Center is currently working with several content experts to draft contextual essays as part of the project.

Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region

The Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Southern Region at MTSU completed its **first round of funded projects** in May 2026. As part of the TPS Regional Program, the TPS Southern Region promotes the widespread, sustained, and effective use of primary

sources from the Library of Congress in a variety of educational settings by increasing access to the TPS Program. The TPS Southern Region is one of the three new regions created by the Library of Congress in 2025. Along with the original regions—Eastern, Midwestern, and Western—the Southern Region joins the Mid-Atlantic/U.S. Territories and the Great Plains to award sub-grants for educational projects and programming to organizations such as university departments, school districts, educational non-profits, museums, public history non-profits, and more. These grants total up to $25,000 each for 6-12-month projects that promote inquiry through the use of Library of Congress primary sources.

During the 2025-2026 sub-award period, **we funded seventeen educational projects** with partners in seven of the eight states of the Southern Region—South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. The sub-award recipients included Warner University (FL), Troy University (AL), Tennessee Geographic Alliance (TN), Kids in Birmingham 1963 (AL), Claflin University (SC), Knox County Schools (TN), University of Central Florida (FL), Academy of the Sacred Heart/Xavier University (LA), Louisiana State Museum/Friends of the Cabildo (LA), Leadership Johns Creek (GA), Mississippi Humanities Council (MS), University of Alabama (AL), Kid smART (LA), Fulton County Teaching Museum (GA), University of West Georgia (GA), and C.L.A.S.S. Outside (GA). One additional partner, a different department of Troy University (AL), was awarded a Lewis-Houghton Civics and Democracy Initiative grant, which involves the use of arts-based primary sources in the teaching of civics. This **first round of funding totaled $368,955.00 in regional grants for sub-award projects and $45,686.84 in mini-grants** for TPS Consortium members from the Southern Region to promote their funded work at state, regional, and national conferences.

Over the past year, the Center's TPS team has built up its administrative efforts, outreach activities, and professional development offerings. TPS staff promoted the TPS Regional program at a variety of conferences and other educational events in order to widely disseminate TPS resources and grant opportunities within the Southern Region. Staff members attended, presented at, and/or exhibited at:

- **Library of Congress Literacy Awards Meeting** – Decatur, GA – attended at the invitation of the Library for networking opportunities and to introduce the TPS Regional Program to attendees.
- **Southeastern Museums Conference** – Montgomery Alabama – presented a session with Lisa Oakley (East Tennessee Historical Society) and Ashleigh Oatts (T.R.R.



Figure 14: Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region staff Kira Duke and Stacey Graham (both on left) with regional partners at the Louisiana Teacher Leader Summit.

Cobb Museum and a former Center graduate assistant who worked on the TPS program) highlighting the TPS regional program and opportunities for museums.

- **Georgia Council for Social Studies Conference** – Athens, GA – presenter and exhibitor.
- **South Carolina Council for Social Studies Conference** – Greenville, SC – presenter and exhibitor.
- **National Council for Social Studies Conference** – Washington, D.C. – presented with other TPS Regional Partners and assisted with TPS Poster Session.
- **Georgia Association of Museums Conference** – Kennesaw, GA – presenter and exhibitor. Presented with Mike Santrock (Fulton County Schools Teaching Museum and Archives), Katherine Perrota (Mercer University), Regina Holland (National Council for History Education), and Ariel Cornett (Georgia Southern University) to highlight their projects and encourage museum educators to consider how TPS could align with their work.
- **Tennessee Association of Museums Conference** – Union City, TN – presenter.
- **National Council for History Education Conference** – Montgomery, AL – poster presenter with other TPS Regional Partners and assisted with TPS Poster Session.
- **Arkansas Museums Association Conference** – Newport, AR -- presenter .
- **Louisiana Teacher Leader Summit** – New Orleans – exhibitor with Soline Holmes (Academy of Sacred Heart), Sam King (Kid smART), and Claire Mulhollem (Louisiana State Museum) to highlight the resources created by their Southern Region-funded projects.
- **Making Connections Conference** – Biloxi, MS – exhibitor.
- **TPS Great Plains Regional Conference** – attended for networking opportunities.

For our professional development offerings, staff **created** **a series of instructional webinars** designed to help educators navigate the Library of Congress website. We also began a series of modules that provide professional development credit to educators who watch the webinars and complete interactive activities that go along with the webinars. And, as always, we continue to produce a **monthly newsletter** and our **"Digging In" webinar** that delves into the newsletter features. We use these monthly products to promote partner projects and invite those partners to share their work both in print and in video.

The TPS team is directed by the Center's Education Outreach Manager Kira Duke, who also serves on the TPS Advisory Board for the national TPS Program. Dr. Stacey Graham is assistant director and leads the design and production of the instructional webinars. Dr. Layla Smallwood, TPS program specialist, assists with the newsletter,

website, communications, and administration. Dr. Antoinette van Zelm, grants specialist, assists with award documents review and communications. Alexandria Lingle McMahan, the Center's historic preservation specialist, oversees all budget forms, processes, and protocols. All TPS staff members closely mentor sub-award recipients throughout the award cycle and monitor the status of each grant.

The culminating event of this past year was our **first-ever Regional Conference for the Southern Region**, which was held May 12-13, 2026, at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Approximately 70 attendees representing all funded projects, plus other educational institutions and organizations, spent two days networking and listening to panel presentations from the sub-awardees. The kick-off speaker was Dr. West, who served for many years as the Center's liaison with the Library of Congress. Vivian Awumey, director of the Teaching with Primary Sources nationwide program for the Professional Learning and Outreach Initiatives Division of the Library of Congress, also spoke. TSLA staff led participants in engaging activities, and the Tennessee State Museum hosted attendees for a special after-hours tour and reception.



Figure 15: Attendees at the Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region Conference in Nashville work on an activity together.

Middle Tennessee Regional History Day

In February 2026, the Center hosted the Middle Tennessee Regional contest, part of the National History Day program, at the MTSU Student Union. The Middle Tennessee Region encompasses twenty-eight counties in Middle Tennessee. Under the leadership of Kira Duke and with the assistance of graduate student Ashli Townsend, the contest saw **an increase in participation from 2025 with more than 230 students and 19 teachers submitting 128 projects** for competition.



Figure 16: GRA Ashli Townsend (left) moderates a panel with MTSU College of Liberal Arts Emissaries at History Day in 2026.

Center staff took on many roles at the Middle Tennessee Regional contest, assisted by volunteers who served as judges. In 2026, 72 individuals volunteered to judge at the regional contest. They included Center graduate assistants, MTSU graduate students, faculty, and MTSU alumni. This year, the MTSU College of Liberal Arts Emissaries presented a panel and small group discussions open to all attendees to highlight the experiences and opportunities that MTSU, and specifically the College of Liberal Arts, had afforded them.

Benchmarks, 2025-2026

Publications:

Books:

West, Carroll Van. *Tennessee's Frontier Century Farms: An Enduring Legacy of Family, Farming, and Community*. Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 2026.

West, Carroll Van. *The United States and World War II: Triumphs and Trials on the Home Front.* National Park Service, 2026.

Articles:

Gatson, Torren, G. Robbins Schug, S. Brown-Jeffy, A. Hunter, & A. Sohler-Snoddy. "Racial equity, ethics, and sustainable futures in anatomical sciences." In S. E. Halcrow, S. Agarwal, C. de la Cova, R. Gowland, & G. Robbins Schug, eds., *Bioarchaeology, Activism, and Social Justice: Equitable and Sustainable Global Futures*. Springer Cham, 2026, pp. 47-70.

van Zelm, Antoinette. "Heroines Aplenty: The Historiography of Revolutionary Women in Tennessee," *Journal of East Tennessee History* 97, Part 1 (2025).

West, Carroll Van. "Two National Anniversaries and a Public History Revolution: East Tennessee Heritage Institutions, 1976-2026." *Journal of East Tennessee History* 97, Part 2 (2026).

Reports:

Gatson, Torren, Carroll Van West, Savannah Grandey Knies, and Blaine Howard. "Seay's Chapel School, Lebanon, Tennessee: Heritage Development Plan." Spring 2026.

Holder, Laura S., Dr. Carroll Van West, Dr. Colbi Layne Hogan, and Stacey S. Watson. *Resting with Dignity: Preserving Toussaint L'Ouverture Cemetery's Stories of Achievement and Community Building.* For the City of Franklin Parks Department, August 2025.

Holder, Laura S. *Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area Performance Progress Report.* For the National Park Service, December 2025.

Holder, Laura S. *Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area Part I and Part II Annual Reports: FY 25.* For the National Park Service, January 2026.

Knies, Savannah Grandey, and Liz Nahach. *Bank of Auburn, Auburntown, Tennessee. National Register of Historic Places Form.* Tennessee Historical Commission, April 2026.

Knies, Savannah Grandey, and Amy NeeSmith. *Idler's Retreat Preliminary Research Report, Smyrna, Tennessee.* April 2026.

Kostine, Amy M., and Savannah Grandey Knies. “Cherokee and Forsyth Counties Trail of Tears Historic Context: Annotated Bibliography, Phase 1.” Georgia Department of Transportation, September 2025.

Simmons, Stephen, and Savannah Grandey Knies. *Hanlan House and Hanner Highland School, Morrison, Warren County, Tennessee.* March 2026.

van Zelm, Antoinette, Laura Holder, Joshua Brown, and Paige Hurley. "The Lawrenceburg Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Lawrence County, Tennessee: History and Adaptive Reuse Suggestions." For the Cumberland Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, September 2025.

van Zelm, Antoinette, Savannah Grandey Knies, and Amelia Blakely. "The Matt Martin House, Bedford County, Tennessee: History and Architectural Description." September 2025.

van Zelm, Antoinette, Stacey Graham, Joshua Brown, and Travis Horn. "Clark Family Log Building in the Leanna Community of Rutherford County, Tennessee." April 2026.

West, Carroll Van, and Katie S. Randall. “The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Assassination Site at the Lorraine Motel, Memphis Tennessee.” National Historic Landmark Nomination, National Civil Rights Museum and National Park Service, 2025.

West, Carroll Van. *Hackney Chapel AME Zion Church, Loudon County, TN*. Heritage Assessment Plan, August 2025.

West, Carroll Van. *Martel AME Church and Cemetery, Loudon County, TN. Preliminary Site Assessment Report*. Tennessee Historical Commission, August 2025.

Brochures, Exhibits, and Websites:

Duke, Kira, Stacey Graham, Layla Smallwood, and Antoinette van Zelm, editors. Teaching with Primary Sources – MTSU Web site (www.mtsu.edu/tps). Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, 2025-2026.

Holder, Laura S., and Paige Hurley. *Celebrating America 250: Rutherford County* Brochure. For the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County, June 2026.

Holder, Laura S. *Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area website.* For the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, 2026.

Kostine, Amy M. *Steelville Community Park, Steelville, MO: Four Panel Exhibit*. Impact 100 Crawford County, Trail of Tears Remembrance Committee, National Park Service, Steelville Area Historical Society, Trail of Tears Association, Cherokee Nation Language Department, and the City of Steelville, Missouri. Installed May 2026.

West, Carroll Van, and Savannah G. Knies. *Mississippi John Hurt: Six Panel Exhibit*. Mississippi John Hurt Foundation, Avalon, Mississippi. Installed September 2025.

West, Carroll Van, and Laura Holder. *Cemetery School, Rutherford County, TN: Six Panel Exhibit.* April 2026.

West, Carroll Van, Laura Holder, Dr. Marquita Reed-Wright, and Paige Hurley. *Merrill-Williams House Exhibit and Installation, Franklin, TN*. For the African American Heritage Society of Williamson County, June 2026.

Presentations, Outreach, and Professional Development:

Duke, Kira, Layla Smallwood, Nikki Ward, and Patrick Hollis. “Mabry-Hazen House: Teaching National History Day with Historic Places, Objects, and the Library of Congress.” Tennessee History Day Teacher Field Trip. Knoxville, Tennessee, July 2025.

Duke, Kira, and Layla Smallwood with the Discover Tennessee History Collaborative. Tennessee America 250 Teachers Institute. Elizabethton, Tennessee, July 2025.

Duke, Kira, Catie Latham, Layla Smallwood, Tonya Staggs, and Nikki Ward. “Historic Castalian Springs – Cragfont: Teaching National History Day with Historic Places, Objects, and the Library of Congress.” Tennessee History Day Teacher Field Trip. Gallatin, Tennessee, July 2025.

Duke, Kira. “Introduction to the Teaching with Primary Sources Regional Program.” Library of Congress Literacy Awards Meeting. Decatur, Georgia, July 2025.

Duke Kira, Stacey Graham, Layla Smallwood, and Elizabeth Webb. “’How-To’ Webinars for Using Library of Congress Primary Sources: What ‘How-To’ Is Helpful for You?” Rutherford County Schools Social Studies Professional Development Day. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, July 2025.

Duke Kira, Stacey Graham, Layla Smallwood, and Elizabeth Webb. “’How-To’ Webinars for Using Library of Congress Primary Sources: What ‘How-To’ Is Helpful for You?” Metro Nashville Public Schools Social Studies Professional Development Day. Nashville, Tennessee, July 2025.

Duke, Kira, Lisa Oakley, Ashleigh Oatts, and Layla Smallwood. “Creating Impactful Programs for K-12 Educators.” Southeastern Museum Conference. Mongomery, Alabama, October 2025.

Duke, Kira, and Layla Smallwood. “Increasing Use of Primary Sources in the Classroom through Teaching with Primary Sources and the Library of Congress.” Athens, Georgia, October 2025.

Duke, Kira, and Antoinette van Zelm. “Increasing the Use of Primary Sources in the Classroom.” South Carolina Council for the Social Studies Conference. Greenville, South Carolina, November 2025.

Duke, Kira, Stacey Graham, Keith Patterson, Barbara Kirby, Regina Holland, Brendon Gillis, and Judith Bee. “Introduction to the Teaching with Primary Sources Regional Program.” National Council for the Social Studies Conference. Washington, D.C., December 2025.

Duke, Kira, Ariel Cornett, Regina Holland, Katherine Perrota, and Mike Santrock. “Expanding Museum Education through Teaching with Primary Sources Regional Grants and

Resources." Georgia Association of Museums Conference. Kennesaw, Georgia, February 2026.

Duke, Kira, Stacey Graham, Keith Patterson, Barbara Kirby, Regina Holland, Brendon Gillis, and Judith Bee. "Teaching with Primary Sources Regional Program." National Council for History Education Conference. Montgomery, Alabama, March 2026.

Duke, Kira, Stacey Graham, Soline Holmes, Sam King, and Claire Mulhollem. Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region Exhibit Booth. Louisiana Teacher Leader Summit. New Orleans, Louisiana, June 2026.

Gatson, Torren. "The Art of Making: Embodied Skills, Material Agencies and the Body Minds of Creation." 2025-2026 Think Tank Research Forum, The Center for Material Culture Studies, The University of Delaware. Fall 2025.

Gatson, Torren. "Reframing the Narrative: Black Material Culture and Its Foundational Role in American History." North Carolina Central University's Annual Distinguished E.E. Thorpe Lecture. Delivered at Stagville Historic Site, Durham, NC, Fall 2025.

Gatson, Torren. "Cultivating Intellect: Black Craftspeople and their Unrelenting Pursuit for Independence." The George Washington Presidential Library at Mount Vernon: The 2026 Mount Vernon Symposium: *Becoming American The Nations Decorative Arts at 250*. Spring 2026.

Gatson, Torren. "Untold Stories: Black Craftspeople in 18th and 19th Century America" Panel, moderated by the Michael Garvey Professor of History and Radcliffe Alumnae Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Tiya Miles. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Manhattan, New York, Spring 2026.

Gatson, Torren. "Then, Now, Next: Crafters, Growers, & Revolutionary Ideals." Humanities Tennessee. Hosted at the East Tennessee Historical Society, Spring 2026.

Gatson, Torren. "'To Feel the Happiness of Liberty': Celebrating 'Making' and 250 Years of African American Material Culture." The Historic Annapolis Foundation, Lecture Series. Spring 2026.

Graham, Stacey, and Ashli Townsend. "Resources and Grants from the Library of Congress to Help Your Museum." Tennessee Association of Museums Conference. Union City, Tennessee, March 2026.

Holder, Laura S. "Two Families, Two Revolutions." WGNS radio interview. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, August 2025.

Holder, Laura S. "Discovering the Past: A Local History Expedition." MTSU CLA Lifelong Learning Institute. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, August 2025.

Holder, Laura S. "The History of Natchez Street Historic District and Hard Bargain." Leadership Franklin. Franklin, Tennessee, September 2025.

Holder, Laura S. “Armchair Tour of Downtown Murfreesboro.” Broken Arrow, OK, Chamber of Commerce. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, October 2025.

Holder, Laura S. “The Revolutionary War Comes to Rutherford County.” MTSU Summer Alumni College. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, June 2026.

Smallwood, Layla, and Nikki Ward. “Davies Manor Historic Site: Teaching National History Day with Historic Places, Objects, and the Library of Congress.” Tennessee History Day Teacher Field Trip. Barlett, Tennessee, July 2025.

Smallwood, Layla. Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region Exhibit Booth. Making Connections Conference. Biloxi, Mississippi, June 2026.

Smith, Amanda McCrary. “Tennessee’s Textile Mill Girls**:** From the Labor Movement to the War Years.” *Customs House Museum Sundays at Three Lecture*. Clarksville, Tennessee, December 2025.

van Zelm, Antoinette. “Enhancing Museum Education through Grants and Resources from the Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Regional Program.” Arkansas Museums Association Conference. Newport, Arkansas, March/April 2026.

van Zelm, Antoinette G. "Heroines Aplenty: Portrayals of Revolutionary Women in Tennessee over the Years." America 250 Lecture Series, Linebaugh Library. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, June 2026.

West, Carroll Van. “Talkin’ about a revolution: Sharing Pasts in Our Times, 1976-2026.” Revolutions: Annual Spring Symposium of MTSU Honors College. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, February 2026.

West, Carroll Van. “Tennessee at America’s 250th: Thoughts and Considerations.” Traveler’s Rest Museum 250th Symposium. Nashville, Tennessee, March 2026.

West, Carroll Van. "Tennessee: An Introduction to its History and Culture.” 250th Symposium of the U.S. Embassy, Moscow, Russia. U.S. State Department. March 2026 (online presentation).

West, Carroll Van. “The 250th and the Montgomery Civil Rights Movement.” Keynote, Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Consortium Meeting. Montgomery, Alabama, March 2026.

West, Carroll Van. “Words and Places: How We Made Tennessee.” Annual Statehood Day Lecture. Tennessee State Library and Archives. Nashville, Tennessee, June 2026.

West, Carroll Van. “Tennessee Joins the Republic, 1796-1820.” Discover Tennessee 250th Symposium for Educators. Tennessee State Museum. Nashville, Tennessee, July 2026.

Professional Leadership:

Duke, Kira V.
State Coordinator, Tennessee Council for History Education
Member, Discover Tennessee History Consortium
Member, Southern Historical Association Committee on Teaching

Gatson, Torren L.
Board of Governors, Decorative Arts Trust
Advisory Board Member, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts
Member, Board of Trustees, Old Salem Museum and Gardens
Board Member, Historic Magnolia House Foundation
Advisory Member, People Not Property Project (Division of the Digital Library on American Slavery)

Graham, Stacey R.
Board Member, Tennessee Geographic Alliance
Member, City of Murfreesboro Historic Zoning Commission

Holder, Laura S.
Secretary, Battle of Franklin Trust Board of Directors
Board Member, Battle of Franklin Trust
Advisory Board Member, Franklin's Charge, Inc., Board of Directors
Board Member, African American Heritage Society of Williamson County

McMahan, Alexandria H. Lingle
MTSU College of Liberal Arts Representative, MTSU True Blue Fusion Blue Partner Network

van Zelm, Antoinette G.
Board Member, H-SAWH Advisory Board
Member, MTSU President's Commission on the Status of Women

West, Carroll Van
Tennessee State Historian
Ex-officio Member, Tennessee Historical Commission
Member, Board of Advisors, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Ramsay Award for Career Achievement in State History Leadership, East Tennessee Historical Society, Knoxville, May 2026
Board Member, Friends of Tennessee State Library and Archives
Board Member, Shiloh Community Restoration Foundation, Alabama

External Funding, 2025-2026

National Park Service: World War II Homefront Book	$28,189.31
National Park Service: Tennessee Civil War NHA	$500,000.00
US Forest Service: Lessons Learned	$109,913.29
City of Franklin: Toussaint L'Ouverture	$6,381.20
Georgia Department of Transportation	$93,920.64
US Forest Service: Unicoi Turnpike; Trail of Tears	$59,786.00
US Forest Service: Land Between the Lakes	$73,160.90
Teaching with Primary Sources-Southern Regional Partner	$1,114,717.63
Middle Tennessee Electric 90th Anniversary Project	$21,957.23
Tennessee Department of Agriculture: Pioneer TN Century Farms Book	$208,500.00
TOTAL	$2,216,526.20

Center for Historic Preservation Staff

Dr. Carroll Van West, Director and Professor
Dr. Torren Gatson, Associate Director
Dr. Antoinette van Zelm, Assistant Director
Dr. Stacey Graham, Research Professor
Amy Kostine, Programs Manager
Kira Duke, Education Outreach Manager
Savannah Grandey Knies, Fieldwork Manager
Laura Holder, Heritage Area Manager
Dr. Layla Smallwood, TPS Program Specialist
Dr. Amanda McCrary-Smith, Preservation Assistant
Alexandria Lingle McMahan, Historic Preservation Analyst
Krystal Marin, Administrative Assistant

<u>Graduate Research Assistants, 2025-2026</u>

Amelia Blakely, MA student
Joshua Brown, MA student
Zoe Flowers, MA student
Faith Godwin, MA student
Travis Horn, PhD student
Blaine Howard, MA student
Paige Hurley, MA student
Aisha Karamustafic, MA student
Liz Nahach, MA student
Stephen Simmons, PhD student
Ashli Townsend, MA student
Shelby Trout, MA student
Elizabeth Webb, MA student