Annual Report, 2024-2025 The Center for Historic Preservation Middle Tennessee State University

















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, it became the administrator of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, a partnership unit of the National Park Service, and ten years later additional agreements with the 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 regional office, 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.

Major Projects and Accomplishments, 2024-2025

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.

Similar opportunities come to students in classes taught by the Center director Dr. Carroll Van West and the Center's Research Professor Dr. Stacey Graham. In 2024-2025 class projects emphasized historic preservation and heritage tourism. These community-supported projects included a history driving tour for **Red Boiling Springs**, a historic mineral springs in Macon County, and a history driving tour for **Orange Mound**, a historic African American neighborhood in Memphis. Another group of students carried out an interpretation plan for heritage tourism programming in **Leiper's Fork**, a rural community in Williamson County.





Donoho Hotel, Red Boiling Springs

Milton's Barber Shop, Orange Mound

Another area of emphasis was new exhibits to boost the heritage tourism potential of rural and small-town museums. As the request of director Jeff Swanson, a graduate student worked with Dr. West and Savannah Knies, the Center's Fieldwork Manager, to develop interpretive panels for the **U.S.S. Tennessee Museum**, which is part of the Scott County Museums in **Huntsville**, **TN**. Other students worked with Dr. West, Knies, and Amy Kostine, the Center's Historic Trails Manager, to develop and install a new museum exhibit at the **Cherokee Removal Museum** at historic **Blythe Ferry in Meigs County**. Dr. West and Dr. Graham also combined students in different classes to work on an assessment and Heritage Development Plan for **Historic Cannonsburgh Museum** in Murfreesboro. A similar Heritage Development Plan came from the efforts of three graduate students in two of Dr. West's seminars at **Longview**, a historic house owned by Lipscomb University. This past academic year Center director Dr. Carroll Van West mentored to completion one PhD in Public History along with three MAs in History at MTSU.

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

The students' community projects typically receive support from the Center's largest national program, the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area. For over a generation the Center

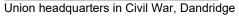
has administered the Heritage Area, which sets out to tell and preserve "the whole story of America's greatest challenge," the Civil War era of 1850 to 1875. The Heritage Area's professional services program allows staff, faculty, and graduate students to carry out on-the-ground projects across Tennessee.

In 2024-2025, the following communities, non-profits, and agencies asked for Heritage Area assistance and Dr. West visited each of the properties, meeting with community members about their goals and needs. He then prepared the following Heritage Development Plans at no charge to the community due to the commitment of MTSU to provide matching funds for Heritage Area professional services for Tennessee communities.

Historic District of Dandridge, Jefferson County. After two days of meetings with property owners, town officials, the county historian, and the Land Trust for Tennessee, the Center prepared recommendations for next steps in historic preservation work in this National Register-listed district, as well as how to better tap into Dandridge's considerable heritage tourism potential.

Trenton Railroad Station, Gibson County. Town and county officials, along with Civil War groups, wanted guidance on moving forward with the restoration and transformation of the historic town depot into a heritage center. Dr. West met with a large group to inspect the building and then a smaller group discussed the needs for the project. Dr. West prepared a plan that emphasized themes and spaces for the future museum.







Trenton Railroad Depot

Lincoln County Museum, Fayetteville. Museum board members were concerned about objects and exhibits in the military section of the National Register-listed museum, which the Center for Historic Preservation had assisted in creating some 35 years earlier. Dr. West and Savannah Knies met with board members and then prepared a plan noting both strengths and weaknesses at the museum and made suggestions on how to improve the facility and find support for improvements.



Savannah Knies discusses with Lincoln County museum board about issues in the military room.

Craigs Chapel Heritage Center, Loudon County. Following up on an earlier Heritage Development Plan from the Center, the Tennessee Conference of the AME Zion Church asked Dr. West for further assistance on planning and implementation. The church property is associated with the Underground Railroad and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Dr. West visited with Tennessee Conference leaders and assigned two graduate students to begin the process of digitizing the property's historic photographs and to develop mock interpretive panels for exhibits.

Graham-Kivette House, Claiborne County. Town and county officials met with Dr. West and Lee Curtis, from the Tennessee State Museum, to discuss museum plans and potential for the historic Graham-Kivette House in Tazewell. Dr. West produced a thorough research report into the property's multiple Civil War associations, including one with U.S. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, and made recommendations for the museum's interpretation.







Tuskega house site, Fort Loudon State Park

Tuskega Plantation Assessment, Fort Loudon State Park, Monroe County. At the request of Tennessee State Parks, Dr. West visited and assessed the Tuskega Plantation property, which is strongly associated with both the Civil War and Reconstruction stories of the Heritage Area. Out of that visit came his report about the Heritage Area's interest in working with State Parks on the property as well as the basis for the MTSU graduate student's summer internship, which was funded by the Heritage Area, to develop more history on the adjacent cemetery.

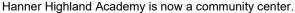
The Center's Heritage Area Manager, Laura Holder, and Fieldwork Manager, Savannah Knies, worked with graduate students to carry out many additional projects:

Hanlan Inn and Hanner Highland Academy, Warren County. At the request of several local community members, Savannah Knies and graduate students visited Morrison in Warren County to assess two historic buildings, the c. 1810 Hanlan Inn and the c. 1855 Hanner Highland Academy building, the latter of which is currently used as a community center. The students conducted historical research on each of the properties and are preparing a report for the community that will help it share the stories of these two prominent local landmarks.

Townsend Cultural Center, Franklin County. The National Heritage Area also funded a 2024 summer internship for Deja Gooch in the Public History Master's program that resulted in a brochure for the Townsend Cultural Center at the historic Townsend School in Winchester. The

Cultural Center tells the story of the school's namesake, U. S. Colored Troops veteran "Doc" Anderson Townsend, as well as the history of the school that he founded as a returning veteran.







Deja Gooch and the Townsend Center

Requests for assistance on historic cemeteries related to the Civil War era came to the Heritage Area constantly in 2024-2025. Heritage Area Manager Laura S. Holder worked with MTSU graduate students on research of the historic cemeteries at the National Register-listed **Johnsonville State Park**, a U.S. army fort from the Civil War in Humphreys County. The Heritage Area also supported the park's ground penetrating radar project which surveyed upper and lower redoubts, a horse corral, and rifle pits. Holder also led a major preservation and interpretation project for the National Register-listed **Touissant L'Ouverture Cemetery** in Franklin. This project also included the contributions of contractors Dr. Colbi Hogan and Stacey Watson and has produced an in-depth look at this National Register-listed property. The City of Franklin and the Cemetery's Trustees also supported and contributed to the project. Another cemetery project, led by Savannah Knies, has allowed MTSU graduate students to gain experience in the GIS-recordation of historic properties while also allowing the Center and the Heritage Area to identify the many Civil War veterans buried at cemeteries in a rural Tennessee county. The **Cannon County Cemetery Survey** is on-going but will provide interested county officials with a valuable assessment of these properties.

The Professional Services Program of the Heritage Area also involves site visits where property owners can discuss concerns and potential solutions. In 2024-2025, these visits included the **Longstreet Headquarters Museum** in Russellville and a Civil War-era log building on the Townes property in Bedford County. Staff and graduate students prepared assessment reports on the log house at the National Register-listed **Booker Farm** in Union County and the caretaker cottage of the National Register-listed **Chapman-Singleton House** in Bedford County. The building was believed to be a kitchen once attached to the main house.

At the request of Tennessee Century Farms owners and the Greene County Mayor, Dr. West visited the flood damaged area of the Nolichucky Valley in Greene County in October 2024. The visit focused on the damage to two properties that the Heritage Area had previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places. **Still Hollow Farm** was severely damaged and property owners showed Dr. West their efforts and plans for restoration. He provided the family with additional photography of the property taken in 2013 that could help their efforts to understand how things were before the flood waters rushed through the farm. **The Earnest Farms Historic District** did not suffer as much direct damage, but flood waters left tons of silt on farm land, and about one-third of the historic Salem Church Cemetery. State Park rangers also asked Dr. West to review the damage at the adjacent Davy Crockett Birthplace State Park.



Nolichucky River flood damage at Earnest Farms (L) and Still Hollow Farm (R) in Greene County



The Heritage Area provided matching funds for several major projects. In Lebanon, support went to the Wilson County Civic League to develop an outdoor interpretive kiosk and seating for the National Register-listed **Rest Hill Cemetery**, a historic African American cemetery in Wilson County. The Heritage Area worked with the Battle of Franklin Trust to develop and fabricate eight interpretive markers at the National Register-listed **Rippa Villa** in Spring Hill to better interpret the property and its families before, during, and after the Civil War. It also provided matching funds for Nashville Public Television's tenth installment of the regional Emmy Award-winning documentary series **The Citizenship Project**. Entitled "Homes of a Different Color," the documentary compared the pre- and post-war experiences of two counties that led to the development of New Deal-era cooperative farms--Black residents in Haywood Farms (Haywood County) and White residents in Cumberland Homesteads (Cumberland County).

3. Historic Preservation in Tennessee's Cities

The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area targets much of its activity in the rural counties, but is also responsive to the needs of Tennessee's cities. In 2024-2025, at the request of the Shelby County Historian, Dr. West, along with Savannan Knies and Dr. Tiffany Momon of the University of the South, carried out a site visit at the National Register-listed **Hunt-Phelan House** on Beale Street in Memphis. The property was a U.S. Army headquarters during the Civil War. The Heritage Area developed an assessment report for the county historian.

Also in Memphis, the **National Civil Rights Museum** in January asked for Dr. West's assistance in preparing the National Historic Landmark nomination for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Assassination Site at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. An initial draft of the nomination has been reviewed by the National Park Service and a final revision is underway, utilizing the thousands of documents released in July 2025 through the executive order of President Donald Trump.







J.W. Frierson Building, Nashville

In Nashville, the Center answered a request from the Metro Historical Commission for assistance with the National Register nomination of the **J.W. Frierson Building** on historic Jefferson Street. The Center also finished four exhibit panels for the **Engine 576**, a historic World War II-era locomotive that is being restored by the Nashville Steam non-profit at the city's railroad yards.

In Knoxville, the Heritage Area supported the **East Tennessee Historical Society** to plan and present a free, multi-day Civil War scholarly symposium that explores the 1863 Knoxville Campaign, Fort Sanders, and its aftermath on the military and home fronts.

In Murfreesboro, Laura Holder and graduate students Paige Hurley, Aisha Karamustafic, Elizabeth Nahach, and Josie Teague continued to manage the **Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County**, a free visitor orientation and museum/heritage center in downtown Murfreesboro. Community outreach events and offerings included two exhibit grand-opening events; an educational tour for curators from the Tennessee State Museum; inperson tours of the downtown square; presentations for graduate classes; and two community scholarly lectures/book discussions; and the addition of three mobile tours through our free Pocket Sights app.

In Columbia, at the request of the county historian, Dr. Antoinette van Zelm and Dr. Graham worked with a graduate student to produce a history and interpretive plan for the **Morton Funeral Home**, a National Register-listed property in the historic downtown commercial district.

4. Historic Preservation Across Rural Tennessee

The Auburntown Historical Society of Cannon County requested assistance in placing the 1922 **Bank of Auburn** building on the National Register of Historic Places. Graduate students worked with Savannah Knies to research the history and architecture of the building, which served the rural community's financial needs until 2003 and continues to serve the community as a local museum. The Bank of Auburn's National Register nomination will be considered by the Tennessee Historical Commission's review board in September 2025.

At Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park in Benton County, Amy Kostine worked with park officials and the local friends of the park group to create new interpretive panels about the **Trail of Tears** at Pilot Knob, which provides a view of the trail's river route, and at an on-the-ground trail in the park.







Liz Nahach photographing the Bank of Auburn

Antoinette van Zelm and Laura Holder, with graduate students Joshua Brown and Paige Hurley, began developing a history and adaptive reuse plan for the **Lawrenceburg Cumberland Presbyterian Church**. The team 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.

In 2024-2025, the **Tennessee Century Farms Program**, led by Assistant Director Dr. van Zelm and Administrative Assistant Krystal Marin, certified 74 new farms. The Center also began work on a new Century Farms book for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. This book will feature the state's frontier farms. Dr. West is preparing the history of these farms and will also visit them to provide up-to-date photography of the farm and its agricultural products. Also in the works is a brochure about the legacies of the program's African American Century Farms, a project that involved Center graduate research assistant Abby Coomes, now a curator at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

5. Assisting Tennessee 250th

In 2024-2025 Dr. West continued as chair emeritus of the Tennessee 250th Commission, now led by Ashley Howell, the executive director of the Tennessee State Museum. He addressed the progress of the commission before the state meeting of the Tennessee chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Franklin in the spring of 2025.

The Center released its first major 250th publication, **A History of the Amis Farm**, in early 2025. The booklet details the history of one of the state's oldest farms in Hawkins County and is distributed to those who visit the National Register-listed Amis home and mill. In neighboring Hawkins County, the Center continued its preservation assistance to two local landmark properties, the National Register-listed **Powel Law Office** and **Rogers Tavern**, both being restored by the Rogersville Heritage Association. The projects are scheduled for completion in 2026, after which the Center will assist with interpretive exhibits.

At the Heritage Center in Murfreesboro, the Center for Historic Preservation held two special fall events to launch the "Two Families, Two Revolutions" exhibit, which chronicles how the families associated with two National Register-listed properties, **the Matt Gardner Farm**, a Reconstruction-era African American farm in Giles County, and **Stony Point**, one of Tennessee's earliest brick houses in Hawkins County, built farms and community institutions that nurtured and inspired later generations to the present. The 250th themed exhibit received an Award of Merit from the Tennessee Association of Museums in March 2025.

6. Historic Preservation for Nationally Significant Southern Places

Mississippi

In Carroll County, Mississippi, Dr. West met with the family owners and the Mt. Zion Memorial Foundation about a historic church building associated with the nationally significant country blues music master, **Mississippi John Hurt**. The property is part of the Mississippi Blues Trail. The National Trust for Historic Preservation had awarded the Foundation funding for the restoration and interpretation of the building. Dr. West inspected the property and prepared a preliminary preservation assessment. The Hurt family then requested the Center's assistance in preparing interpretive panels for the restored church and that work is underway, scheduled to be finished in the fall of 2025.





St. James Church, Mississippi John Hurt Museum

Pine Forest Cemetery, Wilmington, NC

North Carolina

Throughout the year, Dr. West, Savannah Knies, and graduate assistant Deja Gooch worked with the Pine Forest Cemetery Association and faculty and students at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington to prepare a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the c. 1860 **Pine Forest Cemetery** in downtown Wilmington. The cemetery is a significant African American landmark as a Reconstruction-era gathering place for political rallies, its association with the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, and as the resting place of significant people such as architect Robert R. Taylor of Tuskegee University. Knies was the nomination's lead author.

Missouri

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 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 on this new project. Together, they developed four upright and wayside exhibits to interpret the park's history with the Removal. These new exhibit panels, funded by a grant from Impact 100 Crawford County, will be installed in September 2025.

<u>Georgia</u>

Last August, 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, Amy Kostine and Savannah Knies will complete Phase 1 of the project in the fall of 2025 and subsequently begin work on Phase 2 with additional archival visits and field survey.

7. Assisting Tennessee Educators and Teachers Across the South



Rhyder Cowart, graduate research assistant for Tennessee History Day, presents at the 2024 TNCHE Conference.

In February 2025, 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 the Center's education outreach manager Kira Duke and with the assistance of graduate student Rhyder Cowart, the contest saw an increase in participation from 2024 with over one hundred ninety students and twenty-two teachers submitting one hundred twelve projects for competition. Center staff took on many roles at the Middle Tennessee Regional contest, assisted by volunteers who serve as judges for the contest. In 2024, sixty-two 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 discussion open to all attendees to highlight the experiences and opportunities that MTSU and specifically the College of Liberal Arts had afforded them.



Stacey Graham shares educator resources on Tennessee's American Revolution-era history at a teacher in-service event in Nashville.

Teaching with Primary Sources – MTSU, the Tennessee affiliate of the Library of Congress's nationwide education outreach consortium, closed its seventeen-year record for serving Tennessee educators in 2024. We offered two popular virtual offerings, the *Bookmarks!* Virtual Reading Club and the "Digging In" webinar series, while also promoting the Discover Tennessee History initiative and Tennessee History Day. From 2008 to 2024, TPS-MTSU reached thousands of educators, conducted hundreds of in-person and virtual workshops, created dozens of webinars, partnered with dozens of sites and organizations, and produced hundreds of educator resources that are available from our www.mtsu.edu/tps website.

In early 2025, the Center launched its largest national program to date, the **Teaching with Primary Sources Southern Region**. This new partnership with the Library of Congress began with initial funding of \$890,000. The TPS Southern Region encompasses eight states: South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Kira

Duke leads a team of Center staffers--Dr. Stacey Graham, Dr. Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle, Dr. Antoinette van Zelm, and Alexandria McMahan—to administer the program. The newest team member is Dr. Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle, who joined the Center as the TPS Program Specialist in May 2025. She earned her Ph.D. in Public History from MTSU in 2023, having served as a graduate assistant with TPS-MTSU from 2019 to 2022. She also brings experience from her position working with Sister Cities Nashville, where she coordinated educator groups for international travel and partnerships.

The Center joins Waynesburg University (Eastern), American Historical Society (Mid-Atlantic), Illinois State University (Midwest), National Council for History Education (Great Plains), and Metropolitan State University of Denver (Western) as key emissaries for the TPS Consortium nationally. 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 program administers regional subawards of up to \$25,000 for projects lasting six to twelve months. By the end of June 2025, the TPS Southern Region awarded its first grants to Warner University (FL), Troy University (AL), TN Geographic Alliance, and Kids in Birmingham (AL).

Duke joined Library of Congress staff members for the Arkansas Council for the Social Studies conference in Little Rock in June to introduce the new Southern Region. Duke partnered with Dr. Kristin Mann (University of Arkansas, Little Rock), a former recipient of a TPS Regional grant, to share resources at a conference session.

External Funding, 2024-2025

National Park Service: World War II Homefront Book \$41.642.11 National Park Service: Tennessee Civil War NHA \$500.000.00 US Forest Service: Lessons Learned \$109,913.29 City of Franklin: Toussaint L'Ouverture Cemetery \$23,179.23 Georgia Department of Transportation \$117,637.77 US Forest Service: Unicoi Tumpike; Trail of Tears \$65,000.00 US Forest Service: Land Between the Lakes \$79,700.00 Library of Congress-TPS South Regional Partner \$890,653.34

TOTAL \$1,827,725.74

Center for Historic Preservation Staff

Dr. Carroll Van West, Director and Professor
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
Alexandria Lingle McMahan, Historic Preservation Analyst
Krystal Marin, Administrative Assistant

Graduate Research Assistants, 2024-2025

Amelia Blakely, MA student
Joshua Brown, MA student
Rhyder Cowart, MA student
Deja Gooch, MA student
DeLisa Minor Harris, PhD student
Bethany Hollingsworth, MA student
Kate Hughes, PhD student
Paige Hurley, MA student
Aisha Karamustafic, MA student
Ken Mosier, PhD student
Liz Nahach, MA student
Stephen Simmons, PhD student
Ellie Smith, MA student
Josie Teague, MA student