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Formers' Corner: A Message to Formers from Retiring CHP Director, Dr. Van West

Words of farewell from the man himself. [Click here to view the video on the YouTube Formers' Corner playlist.](#)

Happy Trails, Dr. West!

On June 30, 2026, Dr. Carroll Van West will retire after 41 years at MTSU, including 24 years as director of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation. We wish him a fabulous, relaxing retirement!

After graduating with his Ph.D. in History from the College of William and Mary in 1982, West launched his professional career at the State Historic Preservation Office at the Montana Historical Society in Helena. He traveled across the state to develop a historic resource inventory for the state's historic preservation plan, visiting every community in Montana and compiling more than 3,300 images of significant landscapes and historic sites. *A Traveler's*

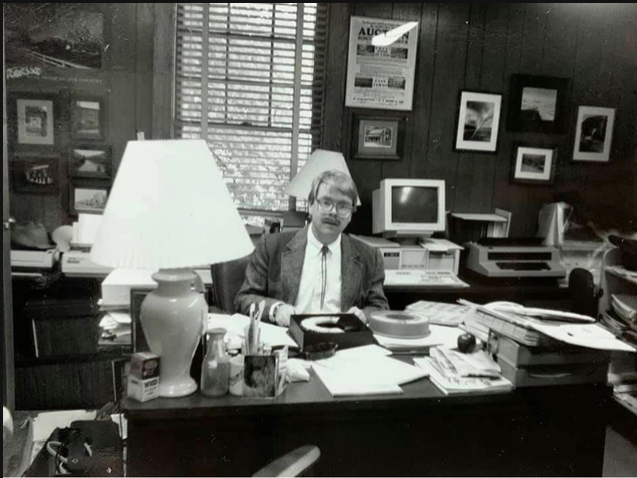


Companion to Montana History: Exploring Historic Landscapes came out in 1986.

Dr. West in Montana in 1983.

Although he returned to Tennessee in 1985 as the research professor at the Center for Historic Preservation, West never left Montana behind, continuing to cultivate professional relationships and encouraging countless graduate students to explore the Big Sky Country. His blog, *Montana's Historic Landscapes*, continues to inspire visitors and natives alike. During his Montana trips, he has also documented the state's best dive bars and coffee shops.

"You invited me to visit the New Atlas bar in Columbus and check out its quintessential western Montana interior. You told me about the history of Columbus.... The story was more than a string of facts and dry definitions. The story was about the power of place, and memory, and family, and history, and all the things that come together to make a location more than a point on a map. Through that story in the New Atlas, you taught me about where I was and why Montana was so special."—Sherry Teal, MTSU M.A., 2018



Sorting slides in the pre-digital age at the CHP, c. 1987.

West has always said that his mentorship of students is his proudest achievement at MTSU. By the time he retires, he will have directed close to 130 M.A. theses, 2 D.A. dissertations, and almost 50 doctoral dissertations! And that does not even come close to reflecting all the students he has influenced through his popular courses in Architectural History, American Material Culture, State and Local History, Historic Preservation, and Cultural Resource Management.

"You belted out your made-up lyrics to your made-up song 'Built in the USA' with Bruce Springstein playing on the boombox the very first day in Architectural History, Spring Semester 1986, which made the entire class (including students who hadn't had you as a professor before then) guffaw in laughter, but also made us realize that we should never know what to expect from you in the classroom."—Jeff Durbin, MTSU M.A., 1989

As director, West took the Center to an unprecedented level of national outreach and prominence. He nurtured partnerships with the National Park Service that became integral to the

Center's work and, especially, its ability to fund and mentor graduate students. The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, which was established in 1996 but didn't receive any funding until 2001, was a fledgling entity when West became director, and he logged the miles and hours needed for it to succeed. Ensuing partnerships with the National Trails Intermountain Region of the NPS and the Library of Congress brought exciting new opportunities for staff, students, and local communities. The significant local impact of these national programs is a testament to West's dedication to grassroots, boots-on-the-ground historic preservation and interpretation.



Trail of Tears Fieldwork in Montgomery County in 2012. Courtesy of David Britton.

"I am so happy to hear you are retiring—you have truly earned this season of rest. Your phenomenal contributions to our nation, Tennessee, and especially to African American history have left a lasting legacy that will continue to inspire generations to come."—Carla J. Jones, Matt Gardner Homestead Museum



With Elaura Guttormson, Victoria Hensley, and Ethan Holden at the 2022 MTSU Commencement.

While expanding the Center's programs and mentoring countless students, West continued to be an engaged scholar and a leader in the profession. He has published about a diverse array of topics, from agriculture to music to architecture. As editor-in-chief of the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, senior editor of the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, and Tennessee State Historian, he has shaped the state's historical scholarship to reflect the experiences of all her citizens. He has always been a

steadfast defender of the importance of using a variety of primary sources to tell the whole story of Tennessee's past.

"Dr. West, as you retire, just think of all of the students, colleagues, and friends who you supported and sustained across the years. Now we'll have to stand on our own and make you proud!" —Dr. Amy Sayward, MTSU History Department and American Democracy Project

Join us to bid farewell

to Dr. West at a public retirement reception from 4:00-6:00 PM on Wednesday, June 3, 2026. The event will be held at the Miller Education Center Atrium, 503 East Bell Street, in Murfreesboro. Please use the QR code (or click on the image) to RSVP so we can get an idea of the number of attendees. See you there!

RSVP-Retirement Reception for Dr. Carroll Van West



Dr. West and Amy Kostine at Monk's Mound at the Cahokia World Heritage Site in Illinois in 2018.

NATIONAL and STATE LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

- * National Historic Landmarks Committee, National Park Service
- * National Board of Advisors, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- * Chair, Tennessee 250th Commission
- * Co-Chair, Tennessee Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission
- * National Advisory Board, Teaching with Primary Sources, Library of Congress
- * Summer Institute Visiting Scholar, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Salem, NC, and University of Virginia
- * Chair, Feis (Public History) Award Committee, American Historical Association
- * Co-chair, 2009 Conference Planning Committee, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- * Executive Committee and Board, Alliance of National Heritage Areas
- * National Advisory Board, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Salem, NC
- * Senior Editor, Tennessee Historical Quarterly
- * Editor-in-chief, Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture

Welcome, Dr. Tiffany Momon!

Taking the reins from Dr. West will be one of his former graduate students, Dr. Tiffany Momon, who served most recently as an Associate Professor of History at Sewanee, the University of the South.



Dr. West and Dr. Momon in Williamsburg, Virginia, in February 2026.

In addition to her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from MTSU, Dr. Momon has degrees in political science from Tennessee State University and in African and African American Studies from the University of Memphis. In 2022, she **reflected on her time as a graduate research assistant** at MTSU.

Like his other former students, Dr. Momon has commented on Dr. West's influence on her

career. She recently stated, "Dr. West has been an invaluable mentor and colleague to me for over a decade. In that time, we've collaborated on numerous projects, traveled together, shared many meals, and celebrated many students. What I will miss the most are his pep talks and his mentorship. I am honored to pick up the torch and lead the center forward, and I thank Dr. West for preparing me for this role."

In 2024-2025, Dr. Momon was a writing fellow at the CHP. She focused on writing her manuscript on the life of John "Quash" Williams, a Black cabinetmaker in 18th-century Charleston, South Carolina. She also worked on furthering and sharing her research on Black craftspeople through the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive (blackcraftspeople.org), which she founded and currently co-directs with CHP associate director Dr. Torren Gatson.

As she prepares to become the CHP's third director on July 1, 2026, Dr. Momon shared these thoughts: "What I am most looking forward to as I begin my new position as the Director of the CHP is getting to know our students and ensuring that they find the same sense of belonging and purpose here that I did. Additionally, I am looking forward to jumping into our projects, conducting fieldwork, and ensuring that we remain a leader in historic preservation in our state." Welcome, Dr. Momon!



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