Dr. Peterson: 2007 Visiting Distinguished Public Historian

Dr. Trudy Peterson

The MTSU Public History program is pleased to welcome Dr. Trudy Huskamp Peterson, former deputy archivist of the United States, as the 2007 Visiting Distinguished Public Historian. Dr. Peterson's 30-year career as an archivist has also included serving on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars appointed her a public policy scholar in 2003. Dr. Peterson is a consulting archivist and the author of Final Acts: A Guide to Preserving the Records of Truth Commissions.

In addition to teaching a summer Session II graduate course on the power of records, Dr. Peterson will also be the featured speaker at a public forum on Thursday, June 21, during which she will address topics related to her international work to connect the preservation of records to human rights.

MTSU Cultural Landscapes Project
by Susan Knowles

Students in the fall 2006 Seminar in Public History conducted a pilot survey of Nashville's cultural landscapes. Working from a site list compiled by Ann Roberts, director of the Metropolitan Nashville Historical Commission; Tonia Woods Horton, director of exhibitions and programs at Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and Museum of Art; and Rebecca Conard, course instructor, four teams studied a variety of landscape types ranging from historic farms and plantations to civic parkland cemeteries, university campuses, and gardened estates.

Before the site visits, students gathered information on each landscape to be surveyed, locating copies of National Historic Register nominations and searching local libraries and archives for published and unpublished documents, public records, and vertical file materials. For some of the sites located in the city of Nashville proper, aerial photographs were found online. Armed with background material, each team visited from three to five sites, recording physical descriptions; interviewing officials, staff members, or residents whenever possible; photographing the landscape and its context; and noting questions that might be answered by further research.
Preservation Students Study Whiskey Distilling in Tennessee

Graduate students Katie Merzbacher, Mallory Smith, and Brian Dempsey are preparing a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the Nelson Distillery in Greenbrier, Robertson County, Tennessee. They are also developing a Web site exhibit as part of their experiential learning in Lorne McWatters's Essentials of Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Management class. Once the location of the largest whiskey distillery in Tennessee, most of the Nelson site's buildings have been destroyed, but the students (assisted by Gary Ferguson, Amanda Hall, and John George) are constructing a Web site that uses historic photographs, interviews, and other documents to tell the story of the distillery within the larger context of the whiskey industry in Robertson County and the region. In addition to learning how conduct the necessary local history research for the National Register nomination, students are receiving hands-on instruction on the use of still and video digital cameras, scanning, videotaped interviewing, and digital editing—skills required to develop the Web site exhibit. Angela Smith, a recent History M.A. graduate who has been admitted to the Ph.D. program, is assisting the students in their work along with M.A. student Ben Hayes and McWatters.

Preservation Grad Students Show Films in Santa Fe

Donna Baldwin, Ben Hayes, and Scarlett Miles showed their films on historic preservation in Murfreesboro in a session called "Visual Media and History: Using Technologies to Teach and Learn History" at the annual conference of the National Council on Public History in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on April 12. Professor Lorne McWatters conceived the films as an experiential learning project for his Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Management seminars in 2006, and the students completed three separate but related films in December. (The films were shown for the first time at the annual Christmas party of the History Department.) Although the films are a collaboration among the three students, McWatters, and filmmaker-historian Angela Smith, the students were responsible for developing their own perspectives on historic preservation in Murfreesboro by gathering the necessary documentation, developing a storyline, taking still photos and making videotapes, filming interviews, scanning documents, and digitally editing the films. Dr. McWatters is including similar projects in all his history classes and with graduate students in historic preservation and cultural resources management classes, using studio space provided by the History Department and employing equipment recently approved in a $114,000 Technology Access Fund (TAF) grant.

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Final surveys were submitted electronically and deposited with the Metropolitan Nashville Historical Commission, where they will serve as the basis for future work on historic landscapes. Commission Director Roberts welcomed the addition of physical descriptions and contextual information. She said, "So many of Davidson County's historic resources were listed on the National Register long before the importance of their landscape and setting was understood. The class project gives us information about landscape features we will use to strengthen the preservation of our landmarks."
Grad Students Prepare Preservation Web Site for Heritage Partnership of Rutherford County

Graduate students Gary Ferguson, Amanda Hall, and John George are completing a Web site for the Heritage Partnership of Rutherford County (HPRC), a newly created local historic preservation advocacy organization. The site is an experiential learning project in Lorne McWatters's Essentials of Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Management class (spring 2007). The students not only learn about historic preservation and local history but also gather the necessary textual and visual documentation that will provide content for the site. Assisted by classmates Katie Merzbacher, Mallory Smith, and Brian Dempsey, and with assistance of Angela Smith and Ben Hayes, the students are learning still and video photography, scanning, videotaped interviewing, and Web site design. They have worked with HPRC board members to create a Web site that reflects the mission of the organization. It is hoped that the Web site will make an important contribution to historic preservation in Rutherford County by offering a place for community interaction on preservation issues and by facilitating the presentation of local historical research.

Ph.D. Candidate Examines Historic Rock Fences

During the spring semester, Ph.D. candidate John George has been documenting historic rock fences throughout Rutherford County. This project was initiated as part of Dr. Hoffschwelle’s American Material Culture seminar. These fences, many dating from the 19th century, were used to mark property boundaries and to contain livestock. They were often found lining both sides of roads, particularly turnpikes, and were constructed by the “dry stack” method from limestone collected while clearing fields for farming. Quarried stone from outcroppings and creek beds was also used. Dry stack masonry is mortarless; only gravity and friction secure the stones. Though the method is ancient, recent research has identified a British origin to the rock fences common to the mid-South. Many outstanding examples of these fences can be found in the bluegrass region of Kentucky. They are now known to have been constructed by Irish stonemasons and enslaved African Americans. While research is ongoing, early field work suggests that the builders of rock fences in Rutherford County were more concerned with function over form; the style is similar to those in Kentucky but more utilitarian, similar to the stone walls of New England. Though very few examples remain in Murfreesboro, many fine rock fences can be seen in the rural communities of Rutherford County, particularly Lascassas, Milton, Readyville, Eagleville, and (not surprisingly) Rockvale.

Mississippi Blues Commission

Brian Dempsey is now completing his second year in the Public History Ph.D. program at MTSU. Working with Dr. Van West at the Center for Historic Preservation, his major project is with the Mississippi Blues Commission. For the past two years, Brian has contributed field research, technical/logistical support, site surveys, and historical analysis for development of the Mississippi Blues Heritage Trail. This trail now includes historical markers throughout the state and will eventually involve audio and DVD components. The project directly relates to Brian’s dissertation topic, which concerns the use of blues culture in Mississippi Delta heritage tourism efforts.
Amanda Hall and Scott Anderson, graduate assistants at the Albert Gore Sr. Research Center, spent the first part of the semester preparing an exhibit to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Title IX. The exhibit, "No Longer on the Sidelines: 35 Years of Title IX at MTSU," was featured during the Women's Studies Conference in late February. It was installed through the end of the semester at the Gore Center, located in Todd Hall 128.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." The exhibit highlighted MTSU's experience with the legislation as well the campus environment before its enactment.

If any MTSU alumni would like to share personal experiences regarding the enactment of Title IX, please contact the Gore Center at (615) 898-2632.