MTSU Forms Society of American Archivists Student Chapter

Last spring, Public History and History majors joined forces to form a student chapter of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). Founding members Evan Spencer, Kayla Utendorf, Olivia Beaudry, Mona Brittingham, Candace Cupps, and Dallas Hanbury were later joined by Beth Rouse, Matt Norwood, and Amanda Barry. Assistant Professor Kelly Kolar, who teaches archival courses, helped set up the chapter.

On March 27, the chapter sponsored a workshop on machine-readable cataloging records (MARC) at the Center for Popular Music (CPM). Archivist Lucinda Cockrell and cataloging librarian Lindsay Million of the CPM conducted the workshop. On April 24, the chapter hosted a preservation workshop at the Rutherford County Archives in Murfreesboro. Director John Lodl taught the workshop with Donna Baker, MTSU’s archivist. The workshop’s title was “Preservation on a Budget.” John and Donna taught thirteen graduate students a variety of economical methods that archivists routinely employ to preserve materials.

Since the workshops, membership has grown to ten. The chapter welcomes all MTSU grad students; admission to the Public History graduate program is not required. If you wish to join and learn more about archival issues and practices, please email Evan Spencer at ers3m@mtmail.mtsu.edu.
From Post Office to Arts Center

During the spring 2014 semester, Dr. Bren Martin’s Essentials of Museum Management class created a lobby exhibit for the Murfreesboro Center for the Arts, which occupies the city’s former post office (built in 1909) and was the home of Linebaugh Public Library for 30 years. The goal of the exhibit, Cornerstone of the Community: A History of 110 West College Street, was to interpret the center’s site as an important part of Murfreesboro’s intellectual, cultural, and social life from the early 20th century to the present. Cornerstone opened on Friday, May 2, with an impressive turnout.

Each student involved had a specific responsibility: project director, exhibit designer, education specialist, project historian/content manager, chief curator, photograph curator, material culture curator, universal design specialist, public relations/marketing coordinator, exhibit coordinator, and digital media curator.

The team, including both master’s and Ph.D. students, gained hands-on experience in research, exhibit layout, and curation and learned the benefits of community partnership, education, and public outreach.

Bren Martin and the exhibit team at the Center for the Arts for the grand opening. (L–R) Lane Tillner, Martin, Thomas Anderson, Mark Mullen, Erica Betross, Heba Abd Elsalam, Teresa Prober, Melissa Hope, Ellen Harper, Kayla Pressley, Caleb Knies, Torren Gatson.
Alumni Spotlight

Nancy Bell (M.A., ’83)

Nancy Bell is executive director of the Vicksburg Foundation for Historic Preservation. Founded in 1958, the foundation works to identify, preserve, protect, and interpret Vicksburg’s architectural heritage. Now in phase 12 of its cultural resource survey, the foundation is consistently adding neighborhoods that are 50 years old or older. Nancy and her team continue to nominate individual buildings and districts to the National Register and work with government, businesses, and individuals who are interested in rehabilitating historic buildings. This includes preparing federal and state investment tax credit applications and consulting on proper rehab techniques, design, and materials. The foundation works with the Board of Architectural Review to make sure that its decisions are based on the guidelines. Nancy lectures to groups; gives architectural walking tours; and occasionally publishes articles, brochures, and books. The foundation also provides assistance to the local Main Street organization and the Southern Cultural Heritage Foundation. It advocates for buildings that are slated for demolition or are being demolished by neglect. Nancy and the team write grant applications for the foundation, the city, and for other not-for-profits. They also own and operate the Biedenharn Coca-Cola Museum, where Coca-Cola was bottled for the first time in 1894. The foundation does all this, and much more, with two full timers and one part-timer on staff. Please check out the website at www.preservevicksburg.org.

Gordon Belt (M.A., ’03)


The latest book has received favorable reviews from the media, including the Knoxville News-Sentinel and the Johnson City Press. Belt is scheduled to participate in a radio interview with MTSU’s On The Record with Gina Logue to discuss the book.

Blythe Semmer (M.A., ’98)

Blythe Semmer has been with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), a small, independent federal agency, for the past eight years. The ACHP issues regulations implementing the federal project planning review process under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and advises the president and Congress on national historic preservation policy. For five years or so, Blythe worked with Section 106 cases from a variety of agencies including HUD, Department of Transportation agencies (FAA, FRA, and FTA), and telecommunications and banking offices. She now coordinates the agency’s training of federal, state, tribal, and local officials; preservation advocates; consultants; and others in how to conduct or participate in Section 106 reviews. A recent focus of her work has been on making more training available through distance learning formats such as webinars and online courses. Working in preservation at the federal level in Washington, D.C., offers chances to learn about preservation issues across the country, to meet lots of people working in the field, and to see how policy takes shape. Plus, Blythe gets to travel to places she might never have visited otherwise.

Blythe is also a Ph.D. candidate in the urban and regional planning and design program at the University of Maryland, focusing on how historic places contribute to sense of place and the role of heritage in defining community identity. Both her professional work and her studies allow her to explore the intersections between historic preservation and planning.
Keeping Up with Alumni

Perky Biesel (D.A., 2005) is codirector of the public history M.A. program at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. She serves on several committees and boards and is chair of the Nacogdoches Historic Landmarks Preservation Commission and president of Millard’s Crossing Historic Village. She is working on her stable architecture research, which acts as a guide to stable complexes and their elements for preservationists and horse enthusiasts.

Tom Kanon (Ph.D., 2010) of the Tennessee State Library and Archives has a new book: Tennesseans at War, 1812–1815: Andrew Jackson, the Creek War, and the Battle of New Orleans (University of Alabama Press, 2014).

Mark Mullen (M.A. expected December 2014) has joined the Smithsonian Institution as a staff historian at the National Museum of American History. He will be working in the education department and on the accessibility team handling accommodations for the blind and visually impaired in the museum’s west wing.

Edward Salo (Ph.D., 2009) has accepted an assistant professorship at Arkansas State University beginning in the fall. Ed takes fourteen years of historic preservation and cultural resource management experience with major environmental consulting firms into his new position teaching graduate courses in the historic preservation and heritage studies program.


Awards and Scholarships

Last spring, several Public History students received awards and scholarships. Bart McCash Memorial Scholarships of $1,500 went to Abigail Gautreau and Dallas Hanbury, and $500 McCash Scholarships were awarded to Cyrana Wyker, Angela Sirna, Joshua Howard, and Elizabeth Lambert. Recipients of the James N. Leonard History Scholarship ($500) were Elaura Highfield and Torren Gatson.

Conferences Attended and Papers Presented

Five graduate students presented papers at the Phi Alpha Theta conference February 22: Jared Bratten, Dallas Hanbury, Elaura Highfield, Josh Howard, and Elizabeth Lambert. Highfield won first place for best graduate student paper with “John Hope Franklin: African American Historical Scholarship, and African American History as Cultural Property.”

Last March, several grad students attended the National Council on Public History conference in Monterey, California. Angela Sirna facilitated a session called “Situation Normal? Ways Past Sequestrations, Government Shutdowns, and Budgetary Woes.” Jessica French presented a poster on her research. Ginna Foster Cannon participated in a working group with Abigail...
Gautreau and Kristen Baldwin Deathridge (alumni). Susan Knowles, fellow Ph.D. grad, participated in another working group for history consultants.


A number of History Department and partner institution faculty members presented as well, including Kevin Cason with “Crossing ‘New Borders’ for Agricultural Education: Dudley Clement’s Pioneering Efforts for the Tennessee FFA,” Dale Cockrell’s “Blood on Fire: Prostitution, Music, and Dance in America, 1840–1917,” Susan Knowles and Ken Middleton with “Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans’ Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity,” and Rebecca McIntyre’s “Austin Peay and the Twisting Road of Tourism in Tennessee.”

Ginna Foster Cannon presented “Sharing Power: The Benefits of Reshaping the Narrative for Luxury Historic Hotels” at the fourth annual Graduate History Forum at the University of Alabama–Birmingham on March 8.
Rutherford County Archives

Rutherford County Archives, in partnership with the Center for Historic Preservation, has been pushing forward on the Rutherford County Cemetery Survey since the end of January. Doctoral student Michael Fletcher is working with Public History alum Catherine Hawkins (M.A., ’11) to locate and document all the cemeteries in the county. Michael serves as the “historian” on the team, documenting tombstones and taking pictures, and Catherine is using GIS technology to digitally map locations.

In January, local historian and collector Bill Jakes contacted the archives when he recently purchased an older house in Murfreesboro and found a box of historical documents in the attic. Graduate research assistants Candace Cupps and Beth Rouse are processing some of the materials in the lab. So far, they have unearthed a slave bill of sale related to the Sam Davis Home in Smyrna; some early manuscripts from Silas Tucker, who helped to incorporate the Town of Smyrna in 1869; early records from several prominent businesses in Murfreesboro; records pertaining to the construction of the historic First Presbyterian Church in Murfreesboro; and some valuable personal letters documenting life in Murfreesboro during the Civil War.

Also this semester, graduate assistants scanned roughly 800 historical pictures from the private collection of Marthalena Morrisey, whose ancestors were early pioneers in Williamson and Rutherford Counties. The images record a significant section of western Rutherford County from the mid-1800s through the early 1900s. One of the most significant images is a c.1920 picture of the Sam Davis Boyhood Home, a rare find indeed! We hope to have the Morrisey Historical Images Collection fully processed by the end of this summer and made available to the public.

—John Lodl

Elaura Highfield, M.A. candidate, researched and mounted two exhibits of original materials for the center’s reading room. The first was a tribute to country-music legend George Jones, and the second was connected to the CPM’s inaugural lecture series, “The American Guitar.” Elaura inventoried and accessioned several donated collections and preserved many rare music books by creating custom-made, acid-free phase boxes for them. She also cataloged over 1,400 pieces of sheet music, checked new acquisitions against existing holdings, edited existing database records, and helped with research requests.

Olivia Beaudry, M.A. candidate, has continued to inventory hundreds of cassette and reel-to-reel tapes from the Charles K. Wolfe Audio Collection. The center received a Grammy Foundation Grant in 2013 to identify, catalog, digitize, and make available the nearly 4,000 audiotapes that relate to vernacular musical styles of the American South circa 1920–2000s. The tapes contain oral histories and interviews with many pioneering country and gospel musicians, singers, songwriters, producers, and publishers, as well as commercial dubs. Olivia has also been cataloging newly acquired photographs for research access.

—Lucinda Cockrell

Center for Popular Music

Public History graduate assistants at the Center for Popular Music (CPM) were busy completing a variety of important projects and programs during spring semester.

Dallas Hanbury, Ph.D. candidate, has continued to process the Joel S. Herron Collection. Materials connected to the songwriter, composer, arranger, and conductor of popular music from the 1940s to the 1960s comprise 44.8 feet of records in 86 boxes and include business correspondence and records, sheet music, compositions, commercial music, orchestrations, drawings, advertisement scripts, and other writings. The CPM received the collection in six filing cabinets that had been untouched since the 1960s. Dallas has been the principal processor, arranging and describing everything according to archival standards. He is also responsible for writing the final finding aid and library record (MARC), which will be published on the CPM website and then in the Walker Library catalog and larger bibliographic catalogs.

Elaura Highfield with her exhibit at the Center for Popular Music
Albert Gore Research Center

The professional staff of the Gore Research Center and three graduate assistants—Aja Bain, Evan Spencer, and Kayla Utendorf—took a field trip to Knoxville in February to explore the East Tennessee History Center in the beautifully restored old Customs House downtown. In addition to picking up videotapes that had been digitized by Quad Tape Transfer, they took the opportunity to meet with Bradley Reeves of TAMIS (Tennessee Archive of Moving Image and Sound).

Upstairs in the center is the Knox County Archives, where they met with archivist Eric Head for a tour of the stacks. They were amazed to see the first county record book from 1792! The group also enjoyed a visit to the East Tennessee History Museum and examined the “See Rock City” display.

Since the visit, discussions have begun with TAMIS about partnering to provide them with a graduate student to help transfer film in Gore Center’s collection to digital formats.

—Jim Williams

Graduate students Kayla Utendorf, Aja Bain, and Evan Spencer with Bradley Reeves of TAMIS, surrounded by his recording equipment and wall art.

Center for Historic Preservation

This semester, the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) grew with the addition of the American Democracy Project (ADP). Led by Mary Evins, ADP at MTSU is part of a national initiative by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to increase students’ civic engagement and awareness. With neighboring universities, ADP at MTSU hopes to create a new National ADP Stewardship of Public Lands program to address issues faced by Smoky Mountain National Park.

The CHP’s support for the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area produced two new exhibitions at Parker’s Crossroads Visitor Center in Henderson County and the Longstreet Headquarters Museum in Hamblen County.

Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU continues to help prepare educators for changes in teaching standards. Recent efforts include a joint project with the Tennessee State Library and Archives for a Cold War workshop, a two-day Founding Documents workshop hosted by the East Tennessee Historical Society, and two one-day workshops in partnership with the Tennessee State Museum for their exhibit Slaves and Slaveholders of Wessyngton Plantation.

Agricultural history remains a key part of CHP activities: there are now almost 1,700 Tennessee Century Farms! The CHP is also working with Alabama to assess its extant resources. Fieldwork coordinator Katie Randall (M.A., 2012) and graduate research assistant Savannah Grandey kicked off the year with a reconnaissance survey, starting in the Wiregrass Region and working through the Black Belt, Limestone Valleys, and Appalachian Plateau. Return trips focused on northern portions of the state, including Skyline Farms, a longstanding partner of the CHP that has done a remarkable job of preserving its New Deal story.

Work continues steadily on the Trail of Tears historic building survey. Project director Amy Kostine (M.A., 2012) and other CHP staff members have spent time in Alabama, Illinois, Missouri, and North Carolina, documenting incredible sites and historic roadbeds.

This May, the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County hosted Bittersweet Harvest, a bilingual, six-panel traveling exhibit that examines the history of Mexican migrant labor in the U.S., especially the Bracero program, a complement of agreements between the two countries concerning contract labor.

To keep up with CHP activities, like us on Facebook or follow the blog Southern Rambles.

—Rachel Martin

Staff of the Gore Center with students Aja Bain, Evan Spencer, and Kayla Utendorf at the “See Rock City” display.

Congrats to Spring 2014 Graduates!

M.A. in History, Public History concentration

Cassandra Bennett
Nadine Breece
Mark your calendars!


For more information or volunteer and sponsorship opportunities, please contact Dr. Bren Martin, chair, local arrangements committee, at Brenden.Martin@mtsu.edu.