Finding Historic Cemetery Community: The 2011 Public History Field School

by Rebecca Conard

In 2011, the Public History program collaborated with Stones River National Battlefield and Bradley Academy Historical Association to launch the first MTSU Public History Summer Field School: Finding Historic Cemetery Community. Cemetery was the largest of several post-Emancipation African American settlements that emerged in Rutherford County after the Civil War. A team of five Ph.D. students and four community scholars conducted oral histories, surveyed historic resources, and developed a web exhibit during the three-week Maymester term. They worked under the direction of Rebecca Conard, Martha Norkunas, and C. Van West, assisted by Susan Knowles, field school coordinator; Dan S. Allen, archaeologist; Michael Gavin, preservation specialist at the Center for Historic Preservation; and Zada Law, Ph.D. student and GIS specialist, Fullerton Laboratory for Spatial Technology. Guest lecturers included Miranda Fraley of the Tennessee State Museum and Gib Backlund, Elizabeth Goetsch, John George, and Lydia Simpson from Stones River National Battlefield.

The highlight of the field school was a one-day public symposium held at Bradley Academy. Guest speakers included Carla Jones, president of the Matt Gardner Homestead; Susan Eva O’Donovan, University of Memphis; Allison Dorsey, Swarthmore College; David Vela, regional director, Southeast Region, National Park Service; and Robert Sutton, chief historian, National Park Service.

Participating in the 2011 Field School were Ph.D. students Rebecca Duke, Hasan Karayam, John Lynch, Kimberly Tucker, and C. Sade Turnipseed. Community scholars were Devora Butler, author of African Americans in Rutherford County (Arcadia, 2009); Anthony King, Metro Davidson Schools, retired; Katie Wilson, chair, Bradley Academy Museum Board of Directors; and Leonora "Boe" Washington, teacher, Smyrna Primary School.

This superimposed image represents the original location of Mt. Olivet Missionary Baptist Church along Van Cleve Lane in an area of Historic Cemetery Community known as “the Cedars.” In 1931, when most homes and outbuildings in this area were removed to create Stones River National Battlefield, the church building was moved to a new location along Old Nashville Highway where it was known as Mt. Olive (no “t”) Missionary Baptist Church. John Lynch took this photo of the church in a dilapidated state in 1992; it is no longer standing. Using Photoshop, he restituted the church in its approximate historic location, now a densely wooded area of the national park.

Leigh Ann Gardner presented “‘Breaking that Backbone’: Images of Emancipation and the Great Emancipator,” at the 2011 Kentucky/Tennessee American Studies Conference, which was called “Images, Sounds, and Meanings of the Civil War.” The event was held May 21, 2011. Gardner also presented “Conflicts over Temperance and Class: The Dissolution of the Working People’s Labor and Art Association” at the 2011 Ohio Valley History Conference October 7, 2011.

Dallas Hanbury and Mona Brittingham served on a student discussion panel at the Society of Tennessee Archivists held at the Siegenthaler First Amendment Center, Vanderbilt University October 27, 2011. The theme of the discussion centered on genealogy and contemporary archival issues.

Susan Knowles, Huhta Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Historic Preservation, MTSU, presented “Traditional Materials, Modern Methods: Tennessee Marble at the National Gallery of Art” at the Southeast Chapter Society of Architectural Historians in Charleston last October.


Cassie Sade Turnipseed presented a lecture titled “Cotton Pickers of America and Sharecroppers Interpretive Center” at the National Black Graduate Student Association South Central Regional Conference, Mississippi State University, on November 11, 2011. The conference name was “Graduate Education in the 21st Century: Global Equalizer.”

New Graduate Students

**Ph.D. Program**

Amber Clawson  
B.S. Appalachian State Univ.  
M.A. College of Charleston  

Thomas Flagel  
M.A. Kansas State Univ.  
M.A. Creighton Univ.

Lydia Simpson  
B.A. Univ. of Alabama  
Birmingham  
M.A. MTSU  

Angela Sirna  
B.A., M.A. West Virginia Univ.

Jerry Wooten  
B.A. Austin Peay State Univ.  
M.A. Murray State Univ.

Cyrana Wyker  
B.A., M.A., MLIS.  
Univ. of South Florida

Workshop leader Dan S. Allen demonstrating gravestone repair and repointing techniques. Watching, L-R: EGS president Boe Washington, Bethany Hall, Angela Sirna. Photos: Rebecca Conard

**Conference Presentations and Publications**

Preserving Evergreen Graveyard

Two days before All Hallows’ Eve (October 29), Evergreen Graveyard in Murfreesboro was the site of a cemetery preservation workshop. Under the direction of archaeologist and cemetery preservationist Dan S. Allen, Public History graduate students teamed with members of the Evergreen Graveyard Society (EGS) to clean and repair gravestones and to honor 94 unknown individuals by identifying their unmarked gravesites with simple brick markers. Allen located the graves during the Summer 2011 Field School. Evergreen Graveyard is an active, historic cemetery associated with Cemetery Community, the largest of several rural African American communities in Rutherford County that formed in the wake of the Civil War.

Participants in the preservation workshop were EGS members Reginald Glimps, George Haynes Jr., Nathaniel Lillard, Pelinda Lillard, Frank Marable, Joe Smith, and Leonora “Boe” Washington, along with MTSU graduate students Lauren Baud, Mona Brittingham, Bethany Hall, Zada Law, Lydia Simpson, Angela Sirna, and Rachel Smith, and faculty member Rebecca Conard.

Cleaning gravestones with non-toxic biological agents: L-R, Rachel Smith, EGS member Pelinda Lillard, Lauren Baud

Photos: Rebecca Conard
MTSU Public History alumni have been a remarkable presence in Nashville for nearly three decades. Phil Thomason is a 1980 graduate and principal of Thomason & Associates, which is approaching its thirty-year anniversary of providing preservation planning services to communities in Tennessee and throughout the country. Andra Martens, a 2005 graduate, is a full-time employee with Thomason’s firm. Three alums—Robbie Jones, David Price, and Katherine Looney—comprise the Nashville branch of New South Associates, a woman-owned business that provides cultural resource services mostly in the Southeast.

Thomason started his firm in 1982. Since then, Thomason & Associates has completed nearly 700 projects, ranging from working with communities in Tennessee to projects for the U.S. government across the country. Thomason recalls doing summer survey work during his graduate career in Giles and Lincoln counties and says it was valuable experience being exposed to the local vernacular architecture. He also says he enjoys the diversity of properties and projects, that the work never gets “stale.” He believes that good community planning is the key to sustainability. His company recently won an award for the preservation plan it developed for Little Rock, Arkansas.

Martens acquired knowledge of Tennessee rural landscapes by completing National Register of Historic Places nominations and oral histories with multigeneration farm owners while she was a student. After graduation, she published Tennessee’s Arabian Horseracing Heritage through Arcadia Publishing’s Images of America series. Martens’s experience has helped her in her career at Thomason & Associates, but she notes that her training as a public historian helped her communicate her research to a lay audience when completing her book.

At the Nashville branch of New South Associates, Jones, a 2002 graduate who also holds a B.A. in architecture from the University of Tennessee, says he values his training at MTSU for enabling him to read, write, and think critically about history. Price, a 2005 graduate, directly attributes landing his position at New South from his internship experience conducting a cultural resource survey at The Hermitage. Looney, a 2010 graduate, also found value in her experience conducting neighborhood surveys in Dr. Van West’s historic preservation class, since she now works full-time as a consultant with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). Jones also works one day per week at TDOT, coordinating projects dealing with Native American groups. The three say that their training in public history has helped them in mitigation projects and public meetings. They enjoy seeing their work being used by the public to initiate change, citing a project they completed at Henley Street Bridge and Bells Bend in Davidson County. However, their work takes them all over the country, and they are often at the forefront of historical research. Jones and Price are currently documenting NASA’s recently decommissioned shuttle program.
Alumni News and Notes

Traci Nichols-Belt (M.A.P.H. 2003) and Gordon T. Belt (M.A.P.H. 2003), coauthored *Onward Southern Soldiers: Religion in the Army of Tennessee in the Civil War*, published by the History Press in August 2011. The book is based on Traci’s master’s thesis. (She also is an ordained and licensed minister.) Her principal research interest is the Civil War with a particular focus on the impact of religion on the military, and she has previously written for *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*. Gordon is library manager for the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University and has written several articles on legislative issues and history for the center’s website. Gordon also is founding editor and publisher of the Posterity Project, http://posterityproject.blogspot.com/, a blog reflecting on archives and history from his home state of Tennessee. He serves as vice president/president-elect of the Society of Tennessee Archivists and as treasurer for TSLAFriends, the friends group for the Tennessee State Library and Archives.


Three alumni have joined the ranks of the National Park Service as permanent park rangers. Elizabeth Goetsch (M.A.P.H. 2011) moved from her position at Stones River National Battlefield to become an interpretive ranger at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Acadian Cultural Center, Lafayette, Louisiana; Benjamin Hayes (M.A.P.H. 2011) is an interpretive ranger at War in the Pacific National Historical Park on the island of Guam; and Kristen Luetkemeier (M.A.P.H. 2007) is at Manzanar National Historic Site in the Owens Valley of California, where she is responsible for the park’s oral history and docent programs. A California native and veteran of several seasonal park ranger stints, Kristen writes, “I’m still pretty amazed that I get to live between Death Valley NP and Sequoia NP.”

Angela J. Smith (Ph.D. 2011) is assistant professor of public and U.S. 20th century history at North Dakota State University. She assumed her new post in January 2012.

Brian Hackett (Ph.D. 2010) is assistant professor of public history at Northern Kentucky State University, having assumed that post in Fall 2010.

Tara White (Ph.D. 2010) joined Alabama State University in August as access services/cultural heritage manager of the Levi Watkins Learning Center (LWLC), the university library. Reporting to the dean of the LWLC, White’s primary responsibility is policy development for and expanding access to the university archives. She also coordinates projects for the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African American Culture, which functions as a repository for manuscript collections; collects oral histories; and initiates public programs in the arts and humanities. In this capacity, she works with various entities on museum projects. Alabama State University is the last of the interpretive centers to be established along the Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail, slated to open in 2015. The homes of Nat King Cole and Ralph Abernathy, during his participation in the civil rights movement, are located on the university campus.


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Completed Internships

Ashley Brown interned at Historic York Inc. in York, Pennsylvania. She assisted with the Lancaster County Historic Resource Inventory: Boroughs Initiative. She also helped research the annual Historic House tour and the Pierceville Run Historic Agricultural District.

Mona Brittingham interned at the University of the South Archives and Special Collections in Sewanee, Tennessee. She processed and cataloged the professional papers of four retired University of the South professors, helped pack the archives and fine art in anticipation of the move to a new facility, and digitized and cataloged photographs from the university’s historic collection.

Morgan Byrn served as programming intern at the Jewish Museum of Maryland in Baltimore, where she gave tours to school groups, clubs, camps, and families and developed the young adult program, “Brews and Schmooze.”


Dallas Hanbury helped process, catalog, and scan the Bill Shacklett/H. O. Todd Collection at the Rutherford County Archive. This is one of the largest collections in the repository and contains approximately 30,000 images from a local photographer. The collection documents the history of Rutherford County from the 1930s to the early 1990s.

Amy Kostine drafted a Tennessee Trail of Tears driving tour brochure and exhibit panels for a new heritage center in partnership with the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Bradley County Chamber of Commerce, and the National Park Service. She also led a workshop, “Using Civil War Photography from the Library of Congress in the Classroom,” at the Civil War Trust Teacher Institute in July 2011.

Charles Nichols served as the museum operations intern at Stones River National Battlefield. He cataloged the park’s backlog of digital images by burning them to archival DVD for storage. He also planned and presented an original Stones River Story about Private Charles H. Nickerson.

Rachel Morris began an archival retrospective conversion project of the 316 legacy finding aids of the Center for Popular Music’s manuscript collections, using Encoded Archival Description to create a master database.

Lauren Pate served as Steele Intern at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

NEH chair Jim Leach met with Rebecca Conard’s Public History Seminar class on September 13 during his campus appearance as Constitution Week keynote speaker. Under the guidance of Mary Evins, director of the American Democracy Project, Constitution Week has become a major annual event at MTSU.
News from the Centers

Center for Historic Preservation
by Anne Leslie Owens

In fall 2011, students and staff were involved in documentation and interpretation projects across the state, including a National Register nomination for McKenzie’s Park Theater, an architectural inventory of Montagle Assembly, a historic Murfreesboro postcard exhibit for the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County, and an interpretive display on the Trail of Tears in Cleveland.

With the advent of the Tennessee Civil War Sesquicentennial (2011–2015), the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area is working with national, state, and local partners to enhance programming statewide. Students and staff have assisted with the Tennessee Civil War Trails program, Nashville Public Television’s Civil War documentary series, the Tennessee Historical Society’s Tennessee in the Civil War book series, and historic structure assessments for Sabine Hill in Elizabethton and the Bate House in Gallatin.

Throughout the fall, center staff and students also participated in several conferences. In September, the center hosted the annual MTSU Reception at the National Preservation Conference in Buffalo, New York. Center director Dr. Van West received the Wiley Oakley Award in October at the Tennessee Governor’s Conference on Tourism in Memphis and was keynote speaker in November at the East Tennessee Preservation Conference in Jonesborough.

Center for Popular Music
by Lucinda Cockrell

The Center for Popular Music (CPM) is fortunate to have two graduate assistants from the Public History program working in the archives. Abby Hathaway, Ph.D. student, is developing an exhibit on railroad music to be placed in the CPM reading room. She is also cataloging sheet music and preparing a finding aid for the Charles K. Wolfe Collection. For the “Freedom Sings” presentation at Tucker Theatre on November 2, Abby researched and mounted an exhibit of banned and censored songs and protest songs. Rachel Morris, M.A. student, accesses new collections as they arrive at the CPM. Rachel prepared and mounted “1911: The Year in Song,” an exhibit to coincide with MTSU’s Centennial, and a “Blue Music” display of special collection materials for the Reading Room. She also continues processing the Gene Jones Collection and working on a project begun during an internship this past summer: a retrospective conversion of the CPM manuscript collection finding aids. In addition, both Abby and Rachel assist outside researchers with research requests.

Albert Gore Research Center
by Jim Williams

Donna Baker joined the staff in November as university archivist, a new position at MTSU. Baker was head of special collections and archives in the Morehead State University library. She brings to MTSU nearly eight years of archive and library experience as well as two master’s degrees: one in library science from UNC-Chapel Hill, and one in history from Eastern Illinois University. As university archivist, Baker will process existing collections in the MTSU archive in the AGRC and will also lead development of records management strategies across the University.

The AGRC is heavily involved in MTSU Centennial commemorations. Staff and students have developed a historical cell phone tour of campus, accessible from anywhere by dialing (615) 756-3044. Graduate students and AGRC archivist Jim Havron (M.A. 2009) are leading the Centennial Memory Capsule project. Modeled on the StoryCorps project, the memory capsule aims to record 500 conversations with people associated with MTSU through its first 100 years. For more information, visit www.mtsu.edu/centennial/memory_capsule.shtml.

We encourage alumni to participate!