

MISSISSIPPI HISTORY NEWSLETTER

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New Till Artifacts Interpret the Whole Story of 1955 Lynching

A crowd gathers outside *The Lynching of Emmett Till* exhibit theater, where new artifacts are on display.

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Sensitive Content

Cover story about Emmett Till contains references to weapons, torture, and murder.

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Message from the Director

We are excited to announce a new partnership with Mississippi State University (MSU) to transform a nineteenth-century college campus near Natchez into a field school for historic preservation trades. Signing a formal agreement with MSU is a major step forward for the Historic Jefferson College project. By combining MSU's curriculum expertise with MDAH's stewardship of the historic buildings on the 80-acre campus, we will create new economic opportunities for southwest Mississippi.

This project grew from vision, persistence, serendipity, and relationships. More than a decade ago, staff in our Historic Preservation Division proposed a field school to address the shortage of skilled craftspeople in rehabilitation and restoration. At the same time, Museum Division staff were exploring ways to reinvigorate a site suffering from declining visitation and deteriorating buildings. Though the campus could tell powerful stories—Native American removal, the cotton economy built on slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction—it was not clear the site could succeed solely as a museum. We decided to take a bold step, launching the field school programming while building restoration is underway. A key early partner was Entergy Mississippi.

The field school was daunting for us as we knew we would need help planning the curriculum and navigating the accreditation process. At a Mississippi Heritage Trust conference, I heard a presentation by Beth Miller, head of MSU's interior design department, about a brand new master's program in Historic Preservation. I introduced myself and told her about our field school plan, and we agreed to stay in touch. With our Historic Preservation team taking the lead, those conversations produced two successful pilot field schools for undergraduates and graduate students, as well as two high school programs. We then brought in a consultant to define how MSU's interests and ours aligned.

Without the leadership of MSU President Mark Keenum, this partnership would not exist. Today, we are embarking on an innovative educational and economic development model that will benefit both students and communities. Students will gain hands-on training in trade skills, while rehabilitated buildings and grounds will host community programs and offer overnight accommodations for extended workshops. The entire region—and indeed the state—will discover many reasons to spend time at this historic campus, steeped in stories and renewed with purpose.



Katie Blount

Katie Blount
Director
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Newly Acquired Emmett Till Artifacts Allow MDAH to Tell Whole Story of the 1955 Lynching

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History recently acquired two artifacts related to the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till—the gun used in the killing and its holster.

The artifacts, now on display in the Two Mississippi Museums, will be used to educate generations about the killing, which is largely credited with sparking the Civil Rights Movement. The Foundation for Mississippi History acquired the artifacts for donation to MDAH, the state agency with a mission to preserve historic places and artifacts.



MDAH leadership announce the newly acquired Till artifacts during a news conference.

The Reverend Wheeler Parker Jr., a cousin of Till who was in the home when the youth was abducted by his killers, said the acquisitions “bring closure” seventy years later.

“Thank you for doing this,” Parker said, noting he would also like MDAH to eventually find Till’s missing ring and the gin fan that had been used to weigh down the youth’s body after it was tossed in the Tallahatchie River.

The gun and holster were owned by J.W. Milam, who along with his half-brother Roy Bryant, confessed to Till’s murder in a *Look* magazine article published in January 1956, months after an all-white jury in Tallahatchie County acquitted the men in the case.

The artifacts were acquired from a Mississippi family that is not connected to the case.

“The gun is the central artifact in one of the most important stories in Mississippi history and American history,” Two Mississippi Museums Director Michael Morris said during a news conference to announce the acquisitions in August.

“The artifacts are displayed in an exhibit about Till’s murder in an interpretation that tells the whole story—from the teen’s entry into Bryant’s Grocery & Meat Market to his murder.”

The artifacts will be on permanent display in the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in a theater where a narrative film describes what happened to Till, a teenager from Chicago who had come to the South to visit relatives seven decades ago.

After Till purchased bubble gum at the grocery store in Money, Mississippi, Carolyn Bryant, the wife of Roy Bryant, accused him of whistling at her. Till was taken from his uncle’s home in the middle of the night on August 28, 1955, and was not seen again until his body was found floating in the Tallahatchie River, tied to a gin fan, and disfigured from torture and lynching.



The weapon used in the lynching of Emmett Till is now on display in a case at the Two Mississippi Museums.

MDAH Director Katie Blount to Retire in 2026

The search is underway for a new executive director for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, following Katie Blount's recent announcement that she plans to retire June 30, 2026.

Blount, who began her career at MDAH as a public relations coordinator in 1994, is the agency's seventh director since 1902 and only the second woman to hold the position. (Charlotte Capers became the first woman to head MDAH and a state agency in 1955.)

Blount's achievements include shepherding the opening of the nationally recognized Two Mississippi Museums in 2017 and supporting the work of state leaders to change the Mississippi state flag. Spence Flatgard, president of the MDAH Board of Trustees, described Blount's leadership as "transformational."

"Katie is universally respected by her peers and state leaders," Flatgard said. "Her love for public service and for Mississippians has helped us tell our story to schoolchildren and to presidents. Our state has been blessed by her leadership, and she will always have our profound gratitude."

Under Blount's leadership, MDAH has strengthened relations with Tribal Partners through repatriation and begun work on several renovation or development projects at historic sites across the state, including the new Vicksburg Civil War Visitor Center, Historic Jefferson College near Natchez, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, the stabilization at Windsor Ruins, and the upcoming Margaret Ann Crigler Park in downtown Jackson.

Blount's work was recently recognized by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). She received the 2025 Individual Lifetime Achievement Award for her commitment to inclusive storytelling at the agency.

"Mississippi's history is complex and powerful—it's essential to understanding who we are as a nation," Blount said. "I'm proud of the work we've done to make that history more accessible, inclusive, and meaningful for all Mississippians and for audiences around the country."

MDAH Museum Division Earns Accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) has announced accreditation for the MDAH Museum

Division. The division administers numerous sites, including the Two Mississippi Museums, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, and the Eudora Welty House & Garden.

The AAM accreditation is the highest national recognition afforded to museums in the United States. Accreditation is evidence of excellence and is a marker of MDAH's dedication to its mission of preserving, documenting, and sharing Mississippi's history.

Of the nation's estimated 33,000 museums, roughly 1,100 are currently accredited. As part of the MDAH Museum Division accreditation, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians was officially reaccredited in 2025, while the Museum of Mississippi History, the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, and the Eudora Welty House & Garden received first-time accreditation.

"MDAH Museum Division sites have always maintained the highest professional standards, with both the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians and the Old Capitol Museum previously earning AAM Accreditation," said Cindy Gardner, division director.

Nan Prince, director of collections at MDAH, said the accreditation reflects the hard work that happens behind the scenes.

"We are excited to receive this news following an intense process of self-study and peer review," Prince said. "I am incredibly proud of our staff."



Community Sponsors Bring Hundreds to the Two Mississippi Museums for Free Days During the State Fair

With the Mississippi State Fair marking America's 250th anniversary, MDAH and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) partnered to expand visitor experiences in Jackson. Positioned just uphill from the fairgrounds, the museums capitalized on the occasion by offering free admission days—made possible by Hitachi Energy Crystal Springs, Nancy and Ray Neilsen, and City of Jackson Mayor John Horhn—to draw fairgoers inside and engage them with Mississippi's broader story.

“Sponsoring a free admission day deepens our outreach, connects us with neighboring communities, and provides opportunities for people to engage with Mississippi's history and civil rights legacy,” said Chivona Roberts, community engagement specialist at Hitachi Energy Crystal Springs.

Hitachi Energy, a new donor, connected with guests and gave out door prizes on October 3, while combined support from the Neilsens and Mayor Horhn underwrote free admission for the final weekend of the fair, October 10-12.

Mayor Horhn noted: “Free admission gives families and fairgoers the chance to experience Mississippi's place in the American story while also enjoying all that Jackson has to offer.” Longtime donor Ray Neilsen added: “These Smithsonian-quality institutions tell a complete story—not just Mississippi's past, but its future and untapped potential.”

A phrase displayed in the museums reflects the MDAH mission: “One Mississippi, Many Stories.” MDAH welcomes opportunities to collaborate with sponsors to engage people in communities across the state in the commemoration activities planned over the next year.



Jackson State University fans enjoy free admission on homecoming weekend.



Chivona Roberts of Hitachi Energy Crystal Springs gives away items as part of the free day sponsored by Hitachi.



Visitors enjoy free weekend on behalf of sponsors Nancy and Ray Neilsen and Mayor John Horhn.

McMillan-Stewart Foundation Grant Opens the Door to Fun Summer and Fall Camps for Youth

This summer and fall, over 140 young people participated in camps at the Two Mississippi Museums. This work is made possible thanks to support from the Geneviève McMillan-Reba Stewart Foundation. A grant from the foundation allowed MDAH to offer the camps at affordable rates.

The History Exploration Camp gave youth a look at “Democracy in Progress,” including the ins and outs of campaigning, voting, and civic engagement. Geared toward rising third through fifth graders, the camp offered experiences like mock elections, behind-the-scenes museum tours, and inspiring guest speakers.

During the Freedom School Camp, sixth through eighth graders deepened their understanding of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and its impact on the world. While learning the stories of local heroes in their communities, the students discovered the dynamics of leadership within communities, the meaning of civic duty, and the empowering act of voting.



Nissan Awards \$40,000 Grant to Support School Visits to the Two Mississippi Museums

The Nissan Foundation has awarded a \$40,000 grant to the Foundation for Mississippi History to support student field trips for the 2025–2026 school year at the Two Mississippi Museums—the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum.

The funding will help offset costs related to admission, transportation, and on-site lunches, expanding access for thousands of students from Title I schools across the state. The support from the Nissan Foundation ensures more young Mississippians can engage with the state’s rich and complex history at no cost to their families or schools.

“The most meaningful change often starts at the local level with people listening, learning and lifting one another up,” said Ali Tonn, senior manager of philanthropy at Nissan North America and executive director of the Nissan Foundation. “Our 2025 grantees create spaces where cultural curiosity thrives, and community bonds are strengthened. It’s a privilege to support organizations that are not only educating and inspiring but also helping to bond and unite.”

Junior League of Jackson Supports Margaret Ann Crigler Park with \$100,000 Donation

The Junior League of Jackson (JLJ) donated \$100,000 to Margaret Ann Crigler Park, MDAH's project designed to create a vibrant green space for families, students, and museum visitors.

Planned in two phases, Crigler Park will expand the experience of the Two Mississippi Museums with a walking path, children's play area, and community lawn. Once complete, it will provide a new, dynamic setting for visiting school groups and for public programs such as Mississippi Makers Fest, Juneteenth Jubilee, and Native American Days.

The JLJ has a long history of partnering with MDAH. In the 1960s, the JLJ adopted the Old Capitol Museum, then the newly opened state historical museum, as one of its projects. Under the leadership of Charlotte Capers, MDAH's first woman director, JLJ volunteers trained as docents and helped formally launch the volunteer program that still thrives today at MDAH.

The JLJ's latest gift will help fund the children's play area in the park.

“The Junior League of Jackson is honored to play a role in the development of Margaret Ann Crigler Park,” said Molly Griffin, president of the JLJ. “As an extension of the Two Mississippi Museums, this innovative outdoor classroom represents a meaningful investment in our city and state. We believe it will significantly support our mission to promote academic growth as well as the health and mental well-being of children and youth.”

MDAH Director Katie Blount emphasized the importance of partnerships in making the park a reality.

“This project can be accomplished only with support from community partners like the Junior League of Jackson,” Blount said. “We’re grateful for their continued support and hope it will inspire others to champion this project that enhances Mississippi’s capital city.”

Construction on Margaret Ann Crigler Park is set to begin in summer 2026, with the first phase scheduled for completion in May 2027.



Junior League of Jackson members pose on the mezzanine of the Two Mississippi Museums during a recent visit.



Molly Griffin, the president of Junior League of Jackson, announces donation for the Crigler Park project.

With Ingalls Shipbuilding's Support, 2,800 Visitors Celebrate Juneteenth at Two Mississippi Museums

More than 2,800 visitors celebrated Juneteenth at the Two Mississippi Museums during a free weekend sponsored by Ingalls Shipbuilding June 19–22. Families and guests of all ages enjoyed free admission throughout the weekend, including the Juneteenth Jubilee on June 19, which featured live performances, line dancing workshops, family crafts, games, and guided museum tours. One visitor commented: “Events like Juneteenth are really important to the community, as they provide the space to recognize important history.”

This year marked the fourth consecutive Juneteenth Celebration sponsored by Ingalls Shipbuilding, highlighting the company's strong commitment to education, culture, and community engagement. Beyond Juneteenth, Ingalls has made significant contributions to the William and Elise Winter Education Endowment, which supports school visits to the museums and ensures thousands of Mississippi students each year can experience history firsthand.

“We are grateful to Ingalls Shipbuilding for their continued partnership,” said Katie Blount, MDAH director. “Their generosity helps us reach communities across the state and expand access to the museums.”



Visitors enjoy fun activities at Juneteenth Jubilee.



Guests enjoy a line dance workshop at Juneteenth Jubilee.

Free Day Sponsored by Foundation for the Mid South Highlighted Civil Rights Leader Medgar Evers

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Foundation for the Mid South, hundreds of visitors enjoyed free admission to the Two Mississippi Museums on July 2, in honor of the 100th birthday of civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

“This is more than just a day at the museums. It’s a chance for individuals and families to reflect, learn, and engage with the transformative journey toward justice that Evers championed,” said Greg Johnson, president and CEO of the Foundation for the Mid South.

The foundation’s support allowed the museums to welcome guests from all over the country, including a group of students from Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, New York. Visitors participated in flash tours led by museum staff, highlighting Evers’ leadership in desegregation efforts, voter registration drives, and the national Civil Rights Movement.

“Through this sponsorship, the Foundation for the Mid South continues its mission of investing in people and communities across the region, ensuring that Medgar Evers’ story of courage and commitment to justice inspires new generations,” said Laney McDonald, director of development at MDAH.

Program Highlights



MDAH Historian Brother Rogers leads trivia at the Two Mississippi Museums for History Happy Hour: Voting, sponsored by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi.



A workshop participant twines the first row of her medicine bag necklace at the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians.



Representatives of HORNE LLP discuss the firm's response in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as part of the *History Is Lunch* series.



MDAH Summer Teacher Workshop participants take a special tour of the Two Mississippi Museums.



Guest storyteller Katherine Flannigan reads to children during a rainy-day story time at the Eudora Welty House & Garden.



A panel of filmmakers and musicians answers questions following the Sunday Screening for *Talkin' Clarksdale*, a documentary about the blues music scene in the Delta town.

MDAH Kicks Off America250 Commemoration with Naturalization Ceremony at Two Mississippi Museums

MDAH kicked off commemoration of America250 by hosting a naturalization ceremony at the Two Mississippi Museums.

By an oath of citizenship administered by U.S. District Judge Daniel P. Jordan III, 80 people became American citizens. More than 300 people attended, including statewide elected officials and members of the America250 Mississippi Commission (America250 MS).

America250's mission is to celebrate and commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, marking America's semiquincentennial. America250 MS is the state's commission charged with collaborating and coordinating partnerships for the historic commemoration.

Representatives from MDAH were among those who joined Governor Tate Reeves when he officially launched the state commemoration at the Mississippi State Fairgrounds in July.

America250 MS is co-chaired by First Lady Elee Reeves; Lynn Hosemann, wife of Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann, and Jolynn White, wife of Mississippi House Speaker Jason White. MDAH Board of Trustees member Nancy Carpenter is the America250 MS development director.

Several grant programs and public initiatives are available for Mississippians who want to engage in the ongoing commemoration. Among the state offices participating are Visit Mississippi, the Mississippi Arts Commission, and the Mississippi Humanities Council. See <https://america250.ms> for more information.



New citizens take the Oath of Allegiance during a naturalization ceremony held at the Two Mississippi Museums.

MDAH Seeks Applications for New Robert “Bob” Moses Civil Rights Research Fellowship

MDAH, in collaboration with historian Leslie-Burl McLemore, has introduced the new Robert “Bob” Moses Civil Rights Research Fellowship. The Moses fellowship is among four offered by MDAH and applications have now opened.

The Moses fellowship is among four offered by MDAH. The others are the Eudora Welty Research Fellowship, the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Research Fellowship and the Religion in Mississippi History Research Fellowship.

McLemore said it is fitting for Moses to be remembered for his work in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement. Moses is widely credited as the architect of Freedom Summer 1964, when hundreds of college students from the North converged in Mississippi to register Black people to vote and operate Freedom Schools for Black children.

All four competitive awards offer a \$5,000 stipend that may be used for research at MDAH for a minimum of two weeks during the summer of 2026. The deadline for all 2026 fellowship applications is March 6, 2026. For more information about the fellowships, email fellowships@mdah.ms.gov.

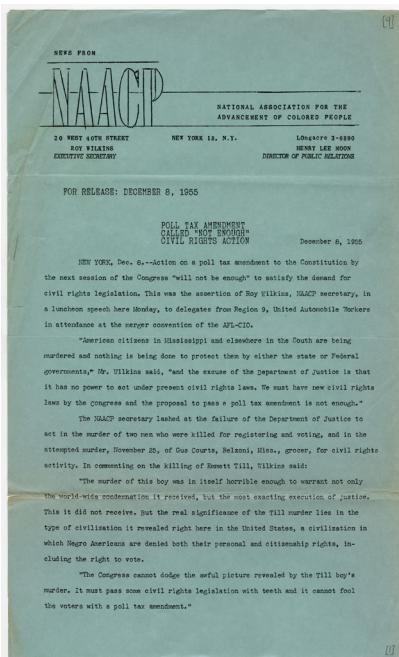


From the Collection

Artist Marie Hull's restored palette will be included in the Mississippi Made exhibit opening March 2026. MDAH restored the palette's wood and stabilized the paint.

From the Collection

This painting, titled *Thanksgiving at Grandma's*, by Meridian artist Eula Crabtree captures the warmth of family and holiday celebration. Painted in 1979 when she was in her 70s, this piece evokes a time in her youth.



From the Archive

In this 1955 news release, NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins responds to a proposed congressional amendment to abolish the poll tax. Wilkins contends abolishing the poll tax alone would not satisfy the national demand for meaningful civil rights legislation. The release was published December 8, 1955, about three months after the brutal murder of Emmett Till. Wilkins noted that Black Americans were being killed in the South and nothing was being done to protect them or bring justice.

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Department of Archives and History
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In Memoriam

Vernon Dahmer Jr., 1929-2025, son of murdered NAACP leader Vernon Dahmer, was a civil rights activist and retired Air Force Senior Master Sergeant. He and the Dahmer family shared their civil rights era artifacts with MDAH.

Mayor Robert Walker, 1944-2025, was a public servant and historian who became the first Black person to serve as mayor of Vicksburg in 1988. He also led the effort to erect a monument for Black Civil War soldiers at the Vicksburg National Military Park.

Robert Parker Adams, 1937-2025, was hired by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History as lead architect on numerous agency projects, including the renovation of the Old Capitol Museum after Hurricane Katrina.

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Mark Your Calendar

Holiday Open House

Saturday, November 15, 11 a.m.

The free event will feature refreshments and discounts at the Mississippi Museum Store at the Two Mississippi Museums.

Christmas By Candlelight Tours

Friday, December 5, 4 p.m.

Celebrate the holiday with a tour of MDAH sites in Jackson.

MLK Night of Culture

Monday, January 19, 6 p.m.

The event, part of a three-day free weekend sponsored by FedEx, will feature artists performing theatre, dance, vocals, visual art, and spoken word poetry.