

MISSISSIPPI HISTORY NEWSLETTER

MDAH
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF
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Message from the Director

This fall, I am writing to you surrounded by architectural blueprints and engineers’ plans—symbols of a remarkable moment for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). Thanks to your unwavering support, MDAH is in the midst of a building boom that will transform the way we share Mississippi’s stories.

We are currently working on new museums in Vicksburg and Natchez, each designed to tell powerful, untold narratives central to American history. In Vicksburg, we will bring to life stories of Civil War naval battles, the heroism of the United States Colored Troops, and the early efforts of freed people to exercise citizenship. In Natchez, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians will house a museum focused on Native American history before the founding of the United States, enhanced by exquisite artwork by Native American artists made possible by a generous donor.

Meanwhile, we are restoring Historic Jefferson College, Mississippi’s first college campus, which once educated the sons of wealthy planters. The project includes the creation of an interpretive center that will explore the cotton economy, slavery, and Reconstruction, and a preservation field school that will teach hands-on skills needed in today’s job market.

Closer to home, we are turning a deteriorating public building into the beautiful Margaret Ann Crigler Park. This green space will connect the Two Mississippi Museums to downtown Jackson, offering a venue for public programs and events that enrich our community.

These projects are possible because of the support of the Mississippi Legislature and successful fundraising efforts. In the last decade, MDAH has raised more than \$25 million from private donors, which has allowed us to grow, innovate, and complete major undertakings at a pace that was once unimaginable. Your generosity is truly the driving force behind the transformation of this agency and the expansion of our ability to tell Mississippi’s stories on a national stage.

Thank you for your continued support as we build the future of Mississippi history—together.



Katie Blount

Katie Blount
Director
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

MDAH's First Preservation Field School at Historic Jefferson College a Model for the Future

MDAH held its first ever preservation field school at Historic Jefferson College in Natchez in late June. The students in this inaugural session were from Mississippi State University's (MSU) Master of Fine Arts in Historic Preservation program. MSU has been a major partner in the development of the field school, offering expertise and identifying needs within the historic trades. The project was made possible through support from Entergy.

The session was conducted by master woodworker Nick Conner. Conner is a native Mississippian and resident of New Orleans, where he operates Conner Millworks. His award-winning rehabilitation work combines sensitivity to historic materials and design with precision craftsmanship. For the field school, Conner guided students through the process of creating wood windows. Students followed his instruction all the way to cutting and glazing glass panes, leaving students with the knowledge to both evaluate and construct wood windows, a practice in danger of being lost, as are most preservation trades.

The plan is that Historic Jefferson College will become a living laboratory for the field school, and the first session has proven the value of this resource. Conner used the buildings to demonstrate different construction techniques, quality of craftsmanship, and evidence of previous replacements.

The inaugural session of the preservation field school demonstrated the feasibility and the potential success of continued field schools at the site.

With the upcoming rehabilitation of Raymond Hall as a more permanent venue for instruction and student accommodations, MDAH intends to seek more partnerships to offer more workforce development activities.



Preservation field school students display their completed window projects.



Instructor Nick Conner gives a wood-working demonstration to preservation field school participants.

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben Elected to MDAH Board of Trustees



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, the fifth democratically elected chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, has been elected to the board of trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH).

Ben is the first Native American and member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians elected to the board.

“Chief Ben brings an excellent background of public service and leadership experience,” said Spence Flatgard, MDAH Board of Trustees president. “MDAH will benefit greatly from his expertise and dedication. We are thrilled to have him on our Board.”

Ben is a lifelong resident of the Pearl River community. He has a 15-year record of public service and leadership to the Choctaw Tribal government, including eight years as the Tribal Council representative for the Pearl River community. He was elected as Tribal Chief in July 2019 and re-elected in 2023. He also served on the Mississippi State Flag Commission, which oversaw the selection of the new state flag that includes a symbol of native territory before statehood.

Ben is a member of the Mississippi USA Semiquincentennial Commission that will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026 and is a board member of the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service. At the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH), Ben serves as a delegate on the Tribal Advisory Committee of the Center for Indigenous Innovation and Health Equity and on the Tribal Advisory Council for the Health Resources and Services Administration.

MDAH Repatriates Native American Ancestors to the Chickasaw Nation

MDAH has repatriated the remains of 95 Native American Ancestors and 1,500 lots of funerary objects to the Chickasaw Nation from sites across northern Mississippi.

The agency followed the guidelines of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law that provides a process for museums and agencies to return Native American human remains and cultural items to Native American tribes.

“We are grateful to the Chickasaw Nation for their partnership and consultation during this important process,” said MDAH Director Katie Blount.

Throughout the process of repatriation, MDAH prioritizes transparency, respect, and connection to the original inhabitants of Mississippi lands. In 2021, MDAH transferred the remains of 403 Native Americans and 83 lots of burial objects to the Chickasaw Nation.

Since the 19th century, archaeological excavations have unearthed hundreds of the ancestral remains of people who once inhabited the state and whose cultures, languages and traditions continue today. NAGPRA, enacted in 1990, gave Native populations the right to claim ancestors and cultural objects in the care of institutions receiving federal funds.

Amber Hood of the Chickasaw Nation said: “These ancestors are not just numbers or statistics; they are family members who were loved and grieved at the time of their death. We maintain a spiritual connection to the people that came before us. Working on NAGPRA cases takes an emotional toll, but it is up to us to advocate on their behalf. The Chickasaw Nation remains committed in our pursuit to repatriate and respectfully rebury our ancestors’ earthly remains. We appreciate that MDAH shares that same goal and has committed to their Repatriate Mississippi Initiative.”

MDAH Receives Grant for Primary Source Education in Secondary Schools

MDAH has received a \$100,000 grant from the Library of Congress to expand primary source education at secondary schools in the Jackson metropolitan area. MDAH is collaborating with Teaching Primary Sources (TPS) Mississippi on the project that runs until Sept. 30, 2025. TPS Mississippi is part of the Library of Congress TPS Consortium, which helps educators enhance students' critical thinking, analytical skills, and content knowledge using the organization's collection of millions of primary sources. Students will engage in project-based learning through primary source research in the classroom. The grant also provides professional development for teachers. The grant announcement came weeks after MDAH's education team presented two workshops on teaching civil rights history to teachers from across the nation. That project, which focused on 1964 Freedom Summer, was funded as part of the National Endowment for the Humanities Landmarks of History and Culture Grant program.



Tougaloo Early College students participate in a research day at the Two Mississippi Museums.



Tougaloo Early College students are given a lesson on the artistry of quilting.

Nissan Foundation Awards \$50K Grant to the Two Mississippi Museums

The Two Mississippi Museums are a 2024 Nissan Foundation grant recipient. The \$50,000 grant will help fund field trips during the 2024-2025 school year, defraying costs for admission, travel, and on-site lunches.

Katie Blount, MDAH director, said students are the museums' most important visitors. "Nissan's support creates opportunities for them to learn and interpret history at a state-of-the-art museum complex," Blount said.

"The Nissan Foundation is about building community by valuing diversity, and this field trip program from the Two Mississippi Museums brings that mission to life," said Chandra Vasser, president of the Nissan Foundation.

Thousands of students visit the museums each year from Title I schools thanks to generous donors that include the Nissan Foundation and the William and Elise Winter Education Endowment.



The Nissan Foundation grant supports student visits from schools across the state to the Two Mississippi Museums.



From the Digital Archives

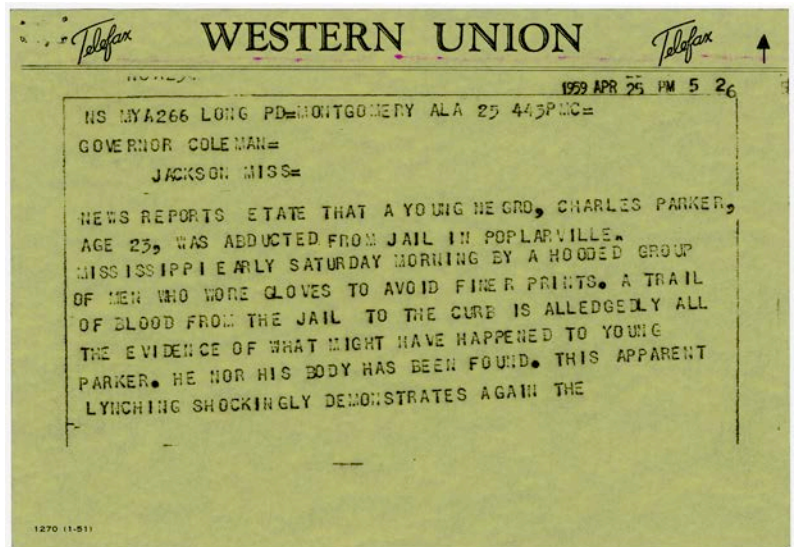
This photo highlights the community center developed by the families of the Bounds Rural Community Development Council in Itawamba County. One of its uses as a Head Start program led to the employment of ten local women.

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
Collection
PI/2010.0002/Series VII

From the Archives

This image is a scan of the first page of a telegram dated April 25, 1959, from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Montgomery, Alabama, sent to Mississippi Governor J.P. Coleman concerning the lynching of Mack Charles Parker.

Telegram, J.P. Coleman Papers (Z/1877),
MDAH.



From the Collection

This line of stuffed teddy bears was created in Germany by Margarete Steiff's company and in the United States by Russian immigrant Morris Michtom in 1902. The teddy bear was inspired by a cartoon of President Theodore Roosevelt, who refused to shoot an injured bear tied to a tree in Mississippi.

This specific toy bear, made in 1994, pays tribute to Elvis Presley, an iconic Mississippi musician and performer. See this toy in person in December with the Possum Ridge model train display at the Two Mississippi Museums.



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In Memoriam

Ann Abadie, 1942–2023, director and associate director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture from 1979 to 2011, instrumental in the creation of initiatives in the Oxford and University of Mississippi community, coedited the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* and *The Mississippi Encyclopedia*.

Wes Busbee, 1939–2024, served as chair of Belhaven University’s history department and held several college leadership positions at the university.

Ben Chaney, 1952–2024, civil rights veteran participated in nonviolent demonstrations more than twenty-one times before he was twelve years old, founder and president of the James Earl Chaney Foundation.

Mark Your Calendar

Holiday Open House

Sunday, November 16, 2024, 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

The Mississippi Museum Store will showcase holiday gift ideas and offer special sales.

Sunday Screening: *gOD-Talk*

Sunday, November 17, 2024, 2 p.m.

Join us at the Two Mississippi Museums for a Sunday Screening of a documentary that explores the intersection of religion and culture in African American history.

Christmas by Candlelight Tour

Friday, December 6, 2024, 4–8 p.m.

Celebrate the holiday season with a tour of MDAH’s sites in downtown Jackson.

MLK Weekend Celebration

Saturday–Tuesday, January 18–21, 2025

Enjoy free admission to the Two Mississippi Museums, sponsored by FedEx in honor of the MLK holiday and the National Day of Racial Healing.