

TRUTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY AT REGIONAL HISTORY MUSEUMS:  
NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND NEEDS IN TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY APPALACHIA

By

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## ABSTRACT

### TRUTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY AT REGIONAL HISTORY MUSEUMS: NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND NEEDS IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY APPALACHIA

Unpacking difficult history has become an increasingly significant topic in public history over the last decade. Attempts to understand difficult historical topics have pushed museum professionals and public historians to create frameworks, processes, and guidelines to define and address interpretation and education surrounding difficult history. This dissertation addresses difficult historical topics in Appalachia such as enslavement and Indigenous removal, and seeks to analyze how small-to medium-sized history museums and institutions are interpreting such issues in the twenty-first century. Using three very different small-to medium-sized history museums in Appalachia as case studies, this dissertation explores institutional responsibilities and current interpretation practices of difficult history regionally. Throughout this dissertation, the question of “What’s so difficult about history in Appalachia” will be continually addressed as museum exhibitions, resources, and research are analyzed.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Accurately interpreting inclusive and diverse histories is a vital responsibility for museum professionals and public historians. Surveys show that community members and museum goers trust museums and the information they present.<sup>1</sup> Over the last thirty years, results further emphasize the importance of public trust in cultural institutions to provide well-researched and inclusive histories, no matter how difficult the topics may seem to be. In 2001, the American Alliance of Museums conducted a study to gauge public trust in museums. The findings were that “almost 9 out of 10 Americans find museums to be trustworthy.”<sup>2</sup> In 2021, the American Alliance of Museums conducted a new study of public trust in museums and cultural institutions and published the findings in “Museums and Trust,” confirming “that the public continues to regard museums as highly trustworthy—ranking second only to friends and family, and significantly more trustworthy than researchers and scientists, NGOs generally, various news organizations, the government, corporations and business, and social media.”<sup>3</sup> Regarding credibility, “Museums and Trust” found that “museum-goers are more likely than non-visitors to find museums credible on the content they share.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Colleen Dilenschneider, “In Museums We Trust. Here’s How Much. (Data Update),” IMPACTS Experience, March 2019. <https://www.colleendilen.com/2019/03/06/in-museums-we-trust-heres-how-much-data-update/>; Also see, “Data Approaches,” IMPACTS Experience, <https://www.impact-experience.com/data/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Museums and Trust 2021,” American Alliance of Museums, September 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/09/30/museums-and-trust-2021/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Museum professionals in the twenty-first century, much like their predecessors, are experiencing transitions and changes in the interpretation of voices and histories. In the hyper-partisan atmosphere of American culture and politics of early 2020s, critics are demanding institutions to temper if not end their explorations of racism and racial violence in their history programming.<sup>5</sup> Today can be a difficult time to be a historian working with and answering to public audiences.

Needs for inclusivity are echoed through publications from the National Council for Public History and the American Association for State and Local History's online *Inclusive Historian's Handbook*. Both institutions emphasized the need for inclusivity and diversity:

Historians hold the awesome power to shape historical narratives. With this power comes an equally awesome responsibility to create narratives that represent all groups within our society. Growing discourse in public history scholarship reflects an increasing acknowledgment of the limited scope of representation within the historical narrative. The conversation about diversity and inclusion within the history field has increased exponentially in the last decade.<sup>6</sup>

While doing this research, I hope to continue to work towards telling fuller narratives in modern history museums and strive for intentional inclusion within public history spaces. I stand with the *Inclusive Historian's Handbook* in believing that “inclusion is an intentional strategy to mitigate power and privilege and maximize the benefits of diversity. Inclusion

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Merrit, “Healing the Partisan Divide,” Center for the Future of Museums Blog, American Alliance of Museums, November 2016, <https://www.aam-us.org/2016/11/14/healing-the-partisan-divide/>. Porchia Moore, “A Liberatory Framework: Critical race theory can help museums commit to anti-racism and combat anti-blackness,” *Museum Magazine*, January 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/01/01/a-liberatory-framework-critical-race-theory-can-help-museums-commit-to-anti-racism-and-combat-anti-blackness/>.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Taylor, “Diversity and Inclusion,” *Inclusive Historian's Handbook*, Co-Sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History and the National Council on Public History, June 2019, <https://inclusivehistorian.com/diversity-and-inclusion/>.

refers to how we leverage diversity within a system to create a fair, equitable, and healthy environment which leads to higher performing groups.”<sup>7</sup>

The concern for broad, inclusive narratives is not new. In 1989, Peter Vergo’s compilation of essays, *The New Museology*, spoke to institutional responsibilities to do more than display or acquire artifacts. As Vergo explained, the institutional responsibility extends beyond the aforementioned and into the spheres of both interpretation and education of museum patrons. In addressing the duality of museums and stepping away from what Vergo refers to as the “Old Museology,” institutions began to dig deeper into the purposes for and impacts of museums.

The ability of the overarching historical narratives to silence stories speaks to the power of historical production.<sup>8</sup> *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) by Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued that power and production of history can be traced not only through well-known narratives, but also through the silences within the narratives. Trouillot analyzed intersectionality of history and power, and the creation of acceptable history. Throughout the book, Trouillot addressed questions of ownership of the past, and essentially challenged the concepts and intermingling of historical narratives, historic credibility, and historic facts. In addition to the stories and collective memories that make up historical narratives, Trouillot begged scholars to unpack and answer: what do historical bundles of silences allude to, and how do these forgotten histories impact collective

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<sup>7</sup> Chris Taylor, “Diversity and Inclusion,” *Inclusive Historian’s Handbook*, <https://inclusivehistorian.com/diversity-and-inclusion/>.

<sup>8</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 2005), xxiii.

understandings and narratives perpetuated? While the competing histories often silence or quiet the voices of those deemed “to have unequal access for production,” the history is still relevant to the larger historical narratives. Trouillot argued throughout *Silencing the Past* that, “History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility, the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.”<sup>9</sup>

Vergo and Trouillot’s assertions prodded institutions and scholars to approach their roles differently.<sup>10</sup> New exhibits and museums centered on the history of women, Indigenous Americans, and African Americans proliferated in the next generation. By the turn of the new century, museum professionals became even more entrenched and intertwined with the field of public history, with research grounded in public and academic responsibility to both memory and heritage studies.<sup>11</sup>

In the early 1990s, museum education scholars began to debate the responsibilities of museums and of museum educators when interpreting historical events and people and presenting questions of historical accuracy and representation to the general public. *The Educational Role of the Museum* (1994), by Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, outlined the interconnections between the themes of education, communication, and interpretation in

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<sup>9</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, xxiii.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Vergo, *The New Museology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Alex de Cossen, David Anderson, and Lisa McIntosh, *Research Informing the Practice of Museum Educators*, (The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2015); Also see Bahia Ramos and Bronwyn Bevan, *Theorizing Equity in the Museum*, (London: Routledge, 2022)

museums.<sup>12</sup> Hooper-Greenfield remains one of the leading practitioners of museum studies, best practices, and the concepts surrounding museum learning, and paved the way for later public historians, like Julia Rose, to analyze museum education best practices.

Best practices for interpreting and teaching the history and impacts of the institution of enslavement in the United States continue to evolve. Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small analyzed in *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (2002) how difficult histories surrounding the interpretation of enslavement and the lives of enslaved people were represented and shared (or not) at historic house museums in southern states. The authors provided a framework to shift from the white-centric stories to a more inclusive interpretation of the lives of Black individuals, both free and enslaved, in pre- and post-Civil War America in the south.<sup>13</sup> In 2006, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, edited by James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, addressed the intersectionality of discussions in the modern public history field of difficult topics like heritage and hate. Additionally, Horton and Horton analyzed the historical memory of founding fathers and other historical figures' legacies that also included their truths as enslavers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *The Educational Role of the Museum*, (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

*New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (2006), edited by Janet Marstine, provides examples of the early stages of this dialogue, building off the work of previous historians like Peter Vergo. Marstine's contributors immersed readers in "key strands of the discourse of new museum theory and to empower them to take part in determining the future of museums by drawing on theory."<sup>15</sup> By engaging and introducing readers to new museum perspectives, this book encouraged discourse by inviting others "to join the politically discharged arena of discussion," regarding interpretative practices and subsequent museum accountability and responsibility.<sup>16</sup>

In "Difficult Exhibitions and Intimate Encounters" (2007), Jennifer Bonnell and Roger I. Simon analyzed the shifts in scholarship and in museum pedagogy in the past thirty years and considered the urgency of the responsibilities of institutions to teach and interpret difficult histories. Bonnell and Simon also examined what qualifies as best practices for displaying and interpreting difficult histories. The authors argued that "exhibitions that grapple with 'the dark side' of human existence must function as more than 'post-it' notes reminding us of our commitment to prevent such histories from being repeated."<sup>17</sup> Many museums, they reminded readers, served as buildings or monuments that interpret specific times, events, and people in the context of a specific space and place, and while the events interpreted can seem like reminders or post-it notes to mark times of difficult history and

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<sup>15</sup> Janet Marstine, "Introduction," in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Bonnell, and Roger I. Simon, "'Difficult' Exhibitions and Intimate Encounters," *Museum & Society* 5, (#2, 2007): 81.

learning. As Bonnell and Simon emphasized, the gravity of interpreting difficult history goes beyond that. They argued that the “the monument expresses power and sense of the society that gives it meaning, and at the same time obscures competing claims for authority and meaning,” further playing into the power and production of history and the modern history museum.<sup>18</sup>

Museums interpret themes, events, and memories of the past and unpack the meanings for audiences in the present. Museums and institutions build upon collective memory and constantly evolving context and frameworks among audiences. Over twenty years ago, Susan Crane observed in *Museums and Memories* (2000) that “museums provide us with objects that are being preserved, saved as memory triggers and archival resources, not for entire cultures, but at the same time for each individual in that culture.”<sup>19</sup> In the same collection of essays, Diana Drake Wilson explores the both the cultural and linguistic differences and intersectionality of Indigenous memory and Euro-American memory. Wilson asserted in “Realizing Memory, Transforming History” that in many Indigenous cultures, memory and the action of “remembering is understood as not only the passive recall or representation of events gone by, but also a creative action instantiating the present and refiguring the future.”<sup>20</sup> Wilson added that there are “many opportunities to engage materials memories in museums not only as disassociated, and not only as dispossessed, but like the

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<sup>18</sup> “Introduction,” *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, Ed. By Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Diana Drake Wilson, “Realizing Memory, Transforming History,” in *Museums and Memory*, Crane, Ed, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 116.

land itself as shared contradictions: always already half someone else's.”<sup>21</sup> Material memories, as outlined in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* (1999), refers to the memories or feelings associated or connected with material culture objects.

For example, in the twenty-first century, many public historians and institutions have started the processes of coming to terms with intentional and unintentional ethnocentrism in spaces of interpretation, and lengthening the discussion table to include and respect stories and voices beyond the Eurocentric viewpoints of generations past. Decolonization is a step back from the root word of colonization and speaks to movements of and for “‘cultural, psychological, and economic freedom' for Indigenous people with the goal of achieving Indigenous sovereignty — the right and ability of Indigenous people to practice self-determination over their land, cultures, and political and economic systems.”<sup>22</sup>

The concept of decolonization continues to be an area of emphasis for museums and public historians, as they navigate inclusive and accurate interpretation and their responsibilities to audiences. Indigenous historian Amy Lonetree’s eye-opening book, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (2012), pushed boundaries by addressing decolonization movements in museums and

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<sup>21</sup> Diana Drake Wilson, “Realizing Memory, Transforming History,” in *Museums and Memory*, Crane, Ed, 136.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 136.

institutions in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>23</sup> Lonetree's work encouraged public historians and institutions to question and address their previous and current roles in interpreting and exhibiting Indigenous histories, while also encouraging new ways forward through decolonization efforts for the future. Building upon the work of *Decolonizing Museums*, Lonetree writes in "Decolonizing Museums, Memorials, and Monuments" (2009), that decolonization efforts are the "relatively recent museological shift from curator-controlled presentations of the Native American past to a more inclusive or collaborative process with Indigenous people actively involved in determining exhibition content."<sup>24</sup> The process involves moving towards more inclusive decision making involving more stakeholders.

Julia Rose's *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* is a fundamental text when engaging with difficult history in the public history field. Difficult history can be described as information or knowledge "that is upsetting, stressful, or too hard to bear," and ultimately pushes learners to accept and address "the discontinuities between the new information [being presented] and learner's status quo."<sup>25</sup> Rose explained that

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<sup>23</sup> Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Lonetree's arguments of allowing Indigenous efforts to guide the story is a key framework that I plan to follow when discussing the role(s) of community voices when accurately interpreting and teaching difficult histories.

<sup>24</sup> Amy Lonetree, "Decolonizing Museums, Memorials, and Monuments" *Public Historian* 43,(#4, 2021): 21-27.

<sup>25</sup> Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*, (Lanham Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 33.

difficult history ultimately “go[es] against our moral understanding of what it means to be part of civilized society” and challenges previous historical thought and decisions.<sup>26</sup>

While I agree with Rose in her statement that as humans we associate savagery and violence as uncivilized and wholly separate from modernity, I would like to expand on this understanding. I argue that in reality modernity in its entirety is an age of difficult history as individuals attempt to uncover, understand, and learn from difficult history. Difficult history, and the understanding of the field, is constantly evolving, and therefore, firmly grounded in modernity and the present-day. Professionals today have many more resources available that allow us to accurately and inclusively interpret difficult history of the past and the present. They challenge how historical research and interpretation was previously conducted and how the accuracies and inaccuracies, as well as silences or symbolic annihilation, allow for a broader understanding of history and a potential reckonings with difficult histories. Interpreting and teaching about narratives and events that have previously been deemed difficult history often evoke strong emotional responses from both museum professionals and the general public during initial introductions and interactions with the objects, images, and text in the museum space.

I argue that museums must engage with difficult history rather than ignore it to avoid making others uncomfortable. Rose countered that despite the fear surrounding the interpretation of difficult histories, much of history contains difficult history or topics that lend to discomfort. Rose detailed in AASLH Technical Leaflet #255, “Interpreting Difficult

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<sup>26</sup> Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*, 7.

Knowledge” (2011), that “CMP (Commemorative Museum Pedagogy) provides ample time for the learning process to unfold to allow the learner to work through his or her learning crisis.” She endorsed the five stages of Commemorative Museum Pedagogy: Receive, Resist, Repeat, Reflect, and Reconsider.<sup>27</sup> Rose argued that the five steps are all parts of a nonlinear cognitive process for learners to make sense of a disruptive history. While examining difficult histories can seem unnerving and uncomfortable, truly digging into the difficult history and searching for the inclusive, full stories will allow for museum professionals “to better understand the human condition through the process of peeling away at the storied layers.”<sup>28</sup>

Rose argued that “for many learners, difficult histories are considered difficult knowledge,” and pointed specifically to Horton’s *Slavery and Public History* (2006). While the text today seems to be somewhat dated because of newer historiography and research published on the subject, the book was a foundational piece of scholarship that paved the way for insightful work analyzing the impact and intersectionality of enslavement and the field of public history.

The hesitancy surrounding the interpretation of enslavement is still happening at history museums and historical sites in the United States. While addressing the hesitancy in interpreting difficult history like enslavement is nothing new to many in the field, public historians continue to push forward, dispel misinterpretations, and work to shift their

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<sup>27</sup> Julia Rose, “Interpreting Difficult Knowledge,” Technical Leaflet #255, (2011).

<sup>28</sup> Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*, xiv.

language usage to reflect current best museum interpretation practices.<sup>29</sup> Despite these shifts, many museums, historic homes, and historic sites in Appalachia continue to inaccurately interpret difficult history like enslavement and Indigenous removal in the region. While changing language shifts within interpretation are a step in the right direction, words are not enough, and action-based interpretation and education need to be implemented through a continuous updating of best practices, training, and progressing forward in interpretation strategies.

Civil War narratives and interpretation within Tennessee are directly connected to regional identities and histories. The state of Tennessee at first was divided in regards to secession and loyalty to the United States on the eve of the Civil War. It was the last southern state to join the Confederacy in June 1861. Much of East Tennessee specifically was pro-Union. A group of leaders even met in Greeneville to consider seceding from the Confederacy. Greeneville is less than thirty miles from the town of Jonesborough, where in 1820, abolitionist Elihu Embree published the *Emancipator*. Despite the pro-Union leanings and abolitionist efforts, in general, in East Tennessee and the Appalachian region, the institution of enslavement was alive and well from the early days of white settlement.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Krisitin L. Gallas and James DeWorld Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Blythe Semmer, "Greene County," Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/greene-county/>; Also see, Durwood Dunn, "Elihu Embree," Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/elihu-embree/>.

The economic and social ties to enslavement continued to strengthen the institution of and loyalty to enslavement in Appalachia, but in a way distinctly unique to the region. In *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates in the Civil War, 1860-1870* (1999), W. Todd Groce detailed the history, often untold, surrounding the Confederate soldiers in Appalachia after the end of the Civil War, as historically Groce argued “few historians have been attracted by their tale of defeat, suffering, and banishment.”<sup>31</sup> Groce continued that the majority of Confederate soldiers in East Tennessee “had entered the fight reluctantly,” and, often, out of necessity.<sup>32</sup> The close relations and economic entanglements among East Tennesseans and the Deep South, pushed many to enlist to further their “new found prosperity.” Groce concluded that the uniqueness of the East Tennessee rebel experience speaks to the complexities of the Appalachian region:

The Confederate experience in East Tennessee was distinctive, if not unique, differing not only in degree but also in kind from that of other Southerners. Just as their economy and culture had diverged from the mainstream of antebellum Southern society, so too did the wartime role played by mountain Rebels deviate from that of the majority of Confederates.<sup>33</sup>

In *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South From Slavery to Segregation* (2001), John C. Inscoe found that while Appalachia had a smaller percentage of enslavement compared to other southern regions, “by 1820 large slave concentrations were emerging ... in

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<sup>31</sup> W. Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates in the Civil War, 1860-1870*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 1999, xiv.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

certain areas in the Shenandoah Valley and the Tennessee Valley around Knoxville.”<sup>34</sup> In *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (2008), Inscoc emphasized that nineteenth-century Appalachians “were first and foremost southerners,” and tended to have similar sentiments towards the institution of enslavement as their southern counterparts.<sup>35</sup> While there are key agricultural differences between the landscapes of the Deep South and Appalachia, Inscoc points to the known fact that Unionist loyalties were not the only sentiments of the region.

Authors Kenneth C. Turino and Max A. Van Balgooy examined, in *Reimagining Historic House Museums: New Approaches and Previous Solutions* (2019), where historic house museums have failed in the past and continue to fail in the present, while providing helpful frameworks for site evaluation and steps for improvement when interpreting difficult histories at historic sites.<sup>36</sup> Other recent contributions that address museum and institutional agencies, responsibilities, and interpretation efforts include recent statements from public history and educational associations. For example, the American Association for State and Local History has recently published in favor of museums and institutions addressing issues of inequities at state and local levels, while also reworking and evaluating current exhibitions

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<sup>34</sup> John C. Inscoc, *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South From Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth C. Turino and Max A. Van Balgooy, *Reimagining Historic House Museums: New Approaches and Previous Solutions* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2019).

and educational programming to include stories of as many perspectives as possible, even if the perspectives speak to the difficult histories.<sup>37</sup>

A number of educational institutions, such as Learning for Justice, formerly known as Teaching Tolerance, have released and continue to release educational materials and resources for classroom educators regarding teaching difficult histories.<sup>38</sup> In 2018, Learning for Justice polled educators, students, and other researchers/public historians over what they knew about enslavement and where the gaps in learning and instructional resources were when interpreting and teaching enslavement. Learning for Justice collaborated with the Southern Poverty Law Center to release an educational and teaching framework, “Teaching Hard History: American Slavery” in 2018. It included a plethora of educational materials (texts, inquiry-based practices/models, a podcast, and other valuable resources) based on best practices to teach enslavement.<sup>39</sup> “Teaching Hard History: American Slavery” is a new, potentially foundational framework that has influenced recent educational and historical perspectives, discussions, and contributed to the shifting of narratives of inclusivity and the teaching and interpretation of difficult histories in the educational and public history spheres.

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth C. Turino and Max A. Van Balgooy, *Reimagining Historic House Museums: New Approaches and Previous Solutions* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Adrienne Van Der Valk, “Teaching Hard History: American Slavery,” *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, Issue 58: Spring 2018, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/Teaching-Tolerance-magazine-58.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> “Teaching Hard History,” Learning for Justice and the Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery>.

In addition to analyzing the silences in interpretation, this dissertation also addresses instances of historical amnesia. In a recent blog post for AALSH, Avi Dector and Ken Yellis delved into this idea and explained that historic “amnesia is often a prominent feature of our history sites—and for good reason: history museums are not only sites of memory, but where we go to make peace with the distressing past.”<sup>40</sup> By addressing instances of denial through erasure, museums and institutions can move forward into modernity to represent difficult regional history both inclusively and accurately.

*Teaching Difficult History in Difficult Times: Stories of Practice* (2022), edited by Lauren McArthur Harris, Maia Sheppard, and Sara A. Levy, explored the many different avenues of topics deemed difficult history through the eyes and experiences of social studies educators and museum professionals. The text highlighted the importance of educator voices and decisions during instruction. The production and power involved in the teaching and interpreting of history, and “when history education is centered in these discussions, the focus is often on what are termed ‘difficult’ or ‘hard histories’ that require looking at how people have treated others, how people have gained and used power, and who has suffered and why. The editors argued that these debates have been happening globally among politicians and policy makers specifically, but often “the voices that are rarely included in these debates are the classroom teachers, the ones who, on a daily basis, face their students, consider the controversies, and make the decisions about how to teach such difficult

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<sup>40</sup> Avi Dector and Ken Yellis, “Authenticity and Authority: The Role of Historic Sites,” (Blog), American Association for State and Local History, August 2020, <https://aaslh.org/episodes-of-change/>.

histories” to their students.<sup>41</sup> By centering the voices of those on-the-ground, classroom educators, the compiled chapters allow for a fresh prospective on difficult history and history education.

While this dissertation focuses on topics of difficult history in the United States, William Logan and Keir Reeves argued in the Introduction of *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with ‘Difficult Heritage,’* (2009), that many countries and cultures deal with an intentional, state-supported movement to retell or rethink histories or heritages deemed difficult, “often inventing traditions and celebrating heritage in ways that serve their own interests, which are often as crude as maintaining a grip on power,” and ultimately speak to the “places of pain and shame,” and the power and production surrounding public perceptions, interpretation, and education of difficult history.<sup>42</sup> *Places of Pain and Shame* addressed difficult heritage in the context of global atrocities including war crimes and genocide. The contributors urged heritage professionals to implement “a sensitive cross-cultural negotiation approach in all stages of the commemoration process, remembering that they are working on someone else’s land,” or engaging with someone else’s heritage and potential generational and historical trauma.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Lauren McArthur Harris, Maia Sheppard, and Sara A. Levy, “Introduction” in *Teaching Difficult History in Difficult Times: Stories of Practice*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2022), 1.

<sup>42</sup> William Logan and Keir Reeves, “Introduction: Remembering places of pain and shame,” in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with ‘Difficult Heritage,’* eds. William Logan and Keir Reeves (New York: Routledge, 2009), 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Creators of professional development materials also have added both materials and curricula for educators. The Library of Congress established Teaching with Primary Sources in 2006 to specifically provide primary source-centered resources for educators. In 2008, the Library of Congress contacted Dr. Carroll Van West of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation to partner with the Library for a statewide program in Tennessee. The Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU program offers professional development opportunities and standard aligned, primary source-centered resources to accurately and inclusively teach social studies courses and make cross-curricular connections. Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU strives to offer “free K-12 professional development thanks to funds provided by the Library of Congress” and “serves educators across Tennessee by improving the way primary sources are used to promote critical thinking in the classroom and across the curriculum.”<sup>44</sup> Throughout my doctoral coursework, I have had the opportunity to work directly with Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU on many projects, including educator professional development workshops and institutes, as well as the creation and updates of lesson plans, resource guides, and other educational materials.

In 2020 I worked with Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU faculty and staff at both the 2020 Tennessee Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference and the National Council for History Education Annual Conference. “American Citizenship: 1865-1965” (see Appendix A), documents the history of diverse groups of Americans striving for equality. The research for this presentation and the subsequent materials traced the legislation regarding

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<sup>44</sup> Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, “What is TPS?,” 2023. <https://library.mtsu.edu/tps>.

citizenship and voting rights in American history through primary sources for Black men, Indigenous people, and women. In letting the sources speak for the people, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU compiled an extensive list of trials and triumphs for many groups and subgroups of Americans as the country grappled with what citizenship, voting rights, and inclusion meant nationally.

By defining citizenship, this presentation and the associated activities addressed the silences in history, marginalized groups and peoples of all sorts while unpacking for students and educators difficult history through the use of primary and secondary sources. The associated lesson plan included a timeline of intertwined citizenship and voting rights resources for Black men, Indigenous people, and women, allowing learners to make conclusions and draw connections among groups of people. By letting the primary sources weave together the difficult histories and stories of citizenship and voting rights in America, this lesson plan provided an approachable and accessible framework for teaching many difficult histories at once.<sup>45</sup>

In 2022, I represented the East Tennessee Historical Society and worked with Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU to create and present research and associated lesson materials (see Appendix B) at the National Council for History Education's Annual Conference. I worked with education specialist, Kira Duke, to compile and share resources in a presentation titled "The Cost of Progress: Examining Labor in Appalachia in the Aftermath

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<sup>45</sup> Teaching with Primary Sources-Middle Tennessee State University, "American Citizenship: 1865-1965," Lesson Plan, 2020. [https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=52773722](https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=52773722).

of the Second Industrial Revolution.” In this research, the primary sources we shared delved into the economic goals and social costs of the Industrial Revolution in mining areas such as West Virginia and East Tennessee where largely white farmers, along with much smaller numbers of African Americans and Indigenous American, exchanged farm work for industrial labor. In this session, the resources outlined included primary sources such as newspaper reports, letters published, and images from the Fraterville Mine Disaster that happened in Anderson County Tennessee in 1902. For this presentation and the discussion of the sensitive and difficult history surrounding a traumatic community event that resulted in the deaths of over 200 coal miners, we adopted a strategy of layering different types of primary and secondary sources, so many different voices and perspectives could be identified. By addressing this topic and this session through source layering, participants were introduced to the information and the tragic story bit by bit and could better process and learn from the tragic story.

Primary sources were an effective way to include many voices about the Industrial Revolution in Appalachia. Another effective tool was introducing related material culture objects. These images and objects of the past allowed for participants to brainstorm, and discuss, and question the history they are being presented. After the discussion of the artifacts, the participants were introduced to images, newspaper articles, and maps detailing the tragic losses and consequences of the Fraterville Mining Disaster. Throughout the process of compiling, interpreting, and presenting this research, I personally discovered that difficult histories are present within all local and regional communities, and for all groups of people, and it is the job of public historians and educators to work with locals to uncover, share, and

learn from these stories. During this presentation we highlighted the vast, multifaceted aspects of progress and change, while nodding to the resiliency of small Appalachian communities in the wake of historical unrest and trauma. Allowing participants to uncover difficult history and tragic historical events through layering many different types of primary and secondary sources creates a learner-led storyline and opens the doors for problem based inquiry into primary sources, while simultaneously encouraging trauma-informed learning and understanding.

In addition to the lesson plans and resources outlined in previous paragraphs, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU continues to provide educational materials for educators that span many difficult histories. While some educators may not have the freedom to teach specific topics in depth due to time or curriculum constraints, museums and programs like Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, have created resources to bridge gaps as needed when teaching all history, including difficult history. Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU continuously creates newsletters, lesson plans, resource guides, and materials for educator professional development.

The Teaching with Primary Sources Teachers Network, created and maintained by the Library of Congress, is a collection of resources and mentors for those involved in education both inside and outside of the classroom. The Network is a private “peer-to-peer platform designed to support teachers, librarians, and other educators in the use of Library of Congress

primary sources to improve student learning,” and allows for thoughtful discourse on a range of topics.<sup>46</sup>

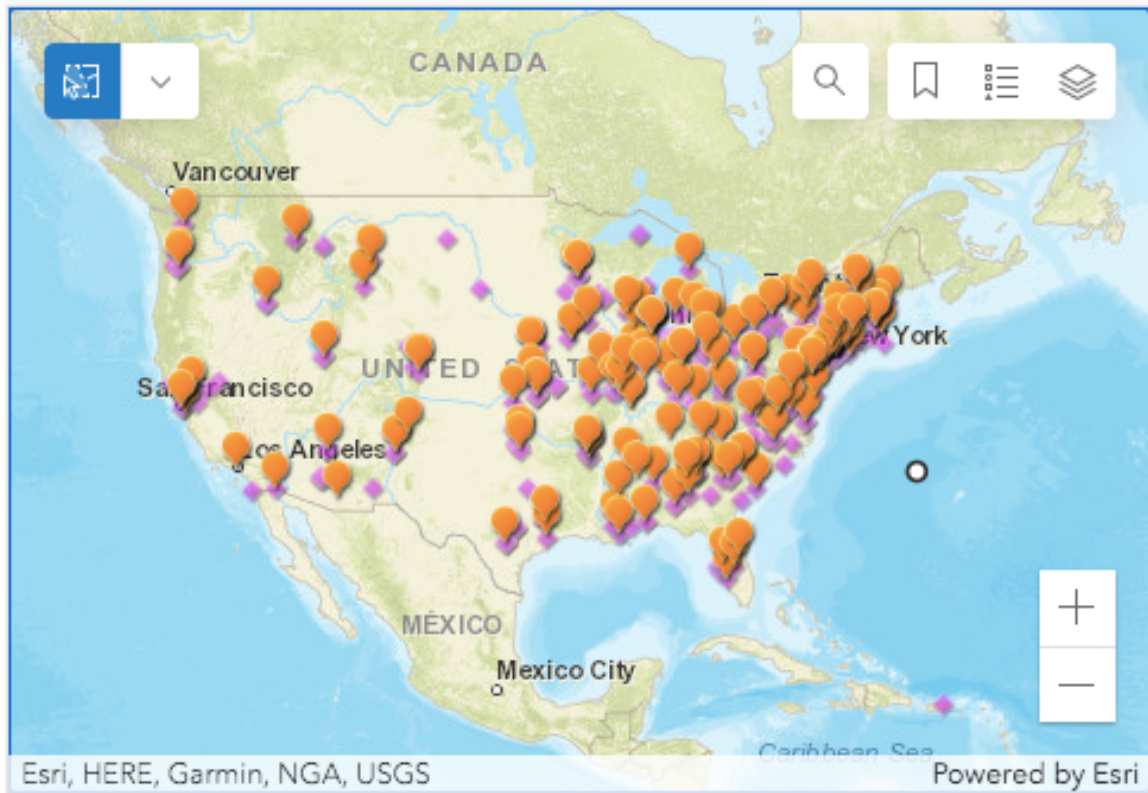
Through my work with Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, I had multiple opportunities to work closely in the Teachers Network by creating and posting content for teacher bookclubs, as well as interacting with the other posts, topics, and information on the constantly updated network. The posts and posters of the TPS Teachers Network do not shy away from discussing or sharing resources for teaching and understanding difficult history. The open forum style of the community allows for the sharing of detailed information that explores a range of primary resources while providing adequate context through multiple perspectives. The Library of Congress’s Teaching with Primary Sources Programs offer in-depth resources, strategies, and in-person and virtual professional development programs that enable educators with the tools needed to tackle and “effectively use primary sources from the Library’s vast digital collections in their teaching.”<sup>47</sup> The “Ask a Mentor” feature on the TPS Teachers Network allows members to network with peers over discussion on different primary-sources based topics. There are also groups educators can join throughout the network. For example, during my time working with TPS-MTSU as a graduate research assistant, we offered semester-long book clubs for local educators on various standards-aligned topics. Our primary source-based resource guides, and discussion threads for the virtual book club meetings were shared and featured on the “Bookmarks” group page.

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<sup>46</sup> Teaching with Primary Sources Teachers Network, “Understanding the Network,” “Purpose,” 2023, <https://tpsteachersnetwork.org/help-center/34-understanding-network>.

<sup>47</sup> Library of Congress, “About This Program,” <https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/about-this-program/>.

The map pictured in Figure 1 provides detailed information about Teaching with Primary Sources Consortium Members around the United States.



*Figure 1. TPS Consortium members. Photograph of map from The Library of Congress.*

The Teaching with Primary Sources program also identifies art and music as important primary sources. Sara Clarke-Vivier’s 2017 dissertation analyzed interpreting difficult history in art museum education through war photojournalism. The study asked questions about teaching, interpreting, and ultimately understanding difficult history through the lens of a camera. Clarke-Vivier’s research followed secondary English teachers as they approached and integrated art history and photojournalism of modern war into the curriculum. She focused on the question “how do high school teachers experience creating and teaching a curriculum built around traumatic historical photography?” and analyzed how

“teacher-designed curriculum resonate[d] with the public curriculum as envisaged by other cultural workers (curator, or the artist)”.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout her study, Clarke-Vivier found that many educators struggled to truly engage with difficult photographs or photographs that seemed too political or too biased. When engaging with difficult history or photographs, this study’s findings in particular point to the need for more research “of the social and professional pressures that limit engagement with difficult historical material is required” in order to develop “robust pedagogical practices in both museum and classroom spaces.”<sup>49</sup>

This dissertation differs from Clarke-Vivier’s study in several ways. First, it focuses on museum interpretation rather than high school educators. Next, it questions the institutional responsibility when engaging with difficult history, not only through photographs, but also through exhibitions, objects, and texts. It reviews and questions overall interpretation and educational approaches in the modern history museum. How or why have regional institutions previously chosen to share or silence information, intentionally or unintentionally, to the general public? This study also identifies how shifts in current practices and scholarship continue to inform future interpretation, exhibitions, and best practices when interpreting difficult history. Instead of analyzing how teachers introduce and engage students in the classroom, my research will examine how public history institutions engage visitors in the museum in hopes of eventually providing museum educators and

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<sup>48</sup> Sarah Clarke-Vivier, "Designing A Curriculum For Difficult History: Teachers, Museum Workers, and Photojournalism," Phd Dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 2017, 17. <https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/165/>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., viii.

institutions with a similar framework to use in a museum or classroom setting when teaching topics deemed difficult history.

This dissertation, while similar to *Teaching Difficult History in Difficult Times*, differs as I specifically examine difficult history in Appalachia regarding the interpretation of enslavement and Indigenous removal. The compiled chapters of *Teaching Difficult History in Difficult Times* includes examples and case studies from a much larger swath location-wise, and this dissertation's focuses specifically on case studies for small-to medium sized museums and institutions.

Many museums today are approaching issues involving reworking, retelling, and accurately interpreting difficult histories associated with their region and/or their institution.

This dissertation assists those efforts by asking:

1. What are the institutional responsibilities of small- to-medium sized regional institutions to their different audiences when exhibiting, interpreting, and teaching difficult historical topics, and historical trauma through material culture and other primary source formats?
2. How do small- to medium-sized regional institutions in Appalachia interpret for and educate their audiences on specific difficult regional histories such as enslavement and Indigenous removal? Have these methods changed significantly over the last two to three decades?
3. What silences do we see in current interpretation practices in small- to medium-sized institutions in Appalachia?

4. How do public historians and museum professionals ensure that resources (pre-visit and post-visit resources for museum outreach and education programs, teaching guides, and resource guides that provide proper contextualization and accurate and inclusive historical overviews) are readily accessible for small-and medium-sized institutions? How can these regional institutions maintain relevancy and ensure interpretation and education best practices are up-to-date in a constantly evolving field?

A generation ago, Appalachian regional museums ignored the difficult history of industrialization. By working with communities, they learned to do better. Now it is time to address instances of denial through symbolic historic annihilation, erasure, or historic amnesia in an earlier time, the first half of the nineteenth century. It is possible and beneficial for museums to work in tandem with one another to interpret and share difficult regional history both inclusively and accurately. The second chapter of this dissertation focuses solely on the evolution of the phrase “difficult history,” and delves into the nineteenth century topics of enslavement, Civil War loyalties, and Indigenous removal - all deemed difficult history in many Appalachian museums and institutions.

Chapter Three examines the history and growth of the East Tennessee Historical Society, a medium-sized regional history institution located in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the organization’s past and current interpretation history and practices on the topics of enslavement and Indigenous removal. As a larger regional institution, the East Tennessee Historical Society has many resources available, and smaller institutions view it as a leader in the public history field.

The fourth chapter addresses how county-centered institutions in Appalachia have addressed instances of silences and erasure and successfully (or unsuccessfully) worked towards inclusivity.<sup>50</sup> This chapter speaks to the responsibilities of county history museums to interpret accurately and inclusively, and serve as comparative, regional studies for the East Tennessee Historical Society. The two institutions analyzed are the Greenville-Greene County History Museum and the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum. Using these two county museums as case studies, my work aims to answer the questions listed on previous pages.

The fifth chapter includes discussion and comparison of a national association and comparison, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), with the previous Appalachian regional case studies. AASLH's efforts to support, train, and educate regional history museums and museum professionals about best practices for history

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<sup>50</sup> The first institution addressed is the Greenville-Greene County History Museum. This museum is located in Greeneville, Tennessee serves as a great example of adaptive reuse, as the museum is housed in the old Andrew Jackson School. More information on the Greenville-Greene County History Museum can be accessed by using this link: <http://www.greenvillegreenecountyhistorymuseum.com/home.html>. The second museum addressed in Chapter Four is the McMinn County living Heritage Museum located in southeastern Tennessee. The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, founded in 1982, is located in the county seat, Athens. The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum is housed in what is now a government building, but, like the building that houses the Greenville-Greene County Living History Museum, it is also an fantastic example of adaptive reuse. Part of the building previously was McMinn Central High School, a segregated school. More information on the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum can be accessed using this link: <https://www.livingheritagemuseum.org/>

interpretation go back decades.<sup>51</sup> The agency's current work and research trajectories created a national framework to guide the final chapter of this dissertation.

The final chapter pulls upon my prior and current positions and experiences in history education and small-to medium-sized organization and museums to address the resiliency of small-to medium-sized history museums as they lead the way for local and regional efforts to teach and interpret difficult histories in the museum.

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<sup>51</sup> The American Association for State and Local History, founded in 1940, has been a hub for historians, public historians and museum professionals to engage in and learn from meaningful research and up-to-date professional development opportunities and advocacy resources. In addition to their professional development and conference outreach, AASLH also produces numerous publications for those in the field, including their Technical Leaflets, their quarterly magazine publication *History News*, and publication projects like the "Inclusive Historian's Handbook." While many public historians have found refuge and resources in AASLH, the organization advocates history for all audiences interested, ensuring that the publications are accessible to all. Today, after almost a century dedicated to state and local history, AASLH serves as "the only comprehensive national organization dedicated to state and local history." More information on the history of and advocacy by the American Association for State and Local History can be accessed using these links: <https://aaslh.org/about/> AND <https://aaslh.org/about/what-we-do/>

## CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS DIFFICULT HISTORY?

The concepts and need behind wanting to identify and understand difficult history are not new and have been pushed for generations of historians, public historians, and educators. The topics, however, of difficult history do tend to evolve over time to reflect societal norms and fears and new and informed research. The Canadian Museum of History defines the concept in “Tips for Teaching Difficult History,” as “difficult [content] if it elicits a strong emotional reaction from an audience. Subjects often include oppression, violence and trauma. Difficult history can force us to confront our own world view, which can be challenging.”<sup>52</sup>

This dissertation focuses on regional history institutions and the ways difficult histories and narratives are taught and interpreted through educational and community outreach programs, and through exhibitions.<sup>53</sup> Difficult histories, as outlined in Julia Rose’s article “Interpreting Difficult Knowledge,” result in stakeholders often rejecting or “turn[ing]away from the difficult knowledge that they cannot stand to know or bear to hear,” as most people “faced with learning difficult knowledge that she or he cannot bear to know [repress]es that information and [return]s to it through expressions of resistance that appear as negativism, irreverence, jokes, and denials.”<sup>54</sup> Silences and lack of inclusivity in the narratives deemed

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<sup>52</sup> Canadian Museum of History, “Tips for Teaching Difficult History,” [2020], [https://www.historymuseum.ca/wp-teachers-zone/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Teaching-Difficult-History-EN\\_Final.pdf](https://www.historymuseum.ca/wp-teachers-zone/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Teaching-Difficult-History-EN_Final.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning*, (New York: State University of New York, 1988), Quoted in Julia Rose, Technical Leaflet #255, “Interpreting Difficult Knowledge,” 2.

<sup>54</sup> Rose, Technical Leaflet #255, “Interpreting Difficult Knowledge,” 2.

difficult history further allude to the need for uncovering and addressing the denial and responsibilities of modern history museums.

In the article “What makes difficult history difficult,” authors Gross and Terra outlined the commonality of difficult history for most countries, but observe that “the challenge of addressing them in and outside the classroom is relatively recent.”<sup>55</sup> The authors admitted that much of United States history courses are centered chronologically and thematically around conflicts, but insisted that not all conflicts are deemed difficult history. Gross and Terra, much like Julia Rose’s “5R Method,” provided a framework for teaching and learning difficult history. In short:

1. Difficult histories are central to a nation’s history
2. Difficult histories tend to refute broadly accepted versions of the past or stated national values.
3. Difficult histories may connect with questions or problems facing us in the present.
4. Difficult histories often involve violence, usually collective or state sanctioned.
5. Partly as the result of the other four conditions, difficult histories create disequilibria that challenge existing historical understandings. <sup>56</sup>

Rose’s Commemorative Museum Pedagogy and “5R Method” included helpful, nonlinear strategies that allow for learners absorb and interact with difficult history. The first R, receive, points to the importance of museum visitors interacting in a safe space and being

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<sup>55</sup> Magdalena H. Gross and Luke Terra, “What makes difficult history difficult?,” *Phi Delta Kappa: The Professional Journal for Educations*, April 30, 2018, <https://kappanonline.org/gross-what-makes-difficult-history-difficult/>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

introduced to difficult history, and Rose suggested that "museum workers and public historians can provide welcoming introduction spaces. They can include disclosure statements about the kind of difficult knowledge contained in the exhibit or presentation, and they can inform visitors that subject matter in the exhibit or presentation could be upsetting or controversial."<sup>57</sup> In addition to receiving information, the second R, resistance, Rose noted "resistance to difficult knowledge is part of a normal learning process," and advises that museum professionals and public historians should anticipate levels of resistance when presenting and interpreting topics deemed difficult history to public audiences.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to receiving and potentially resisting difficult history, audiences will also benefit from the third R, repetition, whether it be from the museum professionals or public historians repeating the information being presented, or repetition of difficult history by visitors on their own terms. Repetition of hard topics and grappling with difficult history also go hand-in-hand with reflection of the topics, potentially creating "opportunities for conversation or places to sit down in an exhibit or presentation will encourage learners to reflect on the difficult knowledge."<sup>59</sup> Often associated with reflection, Rose explained, is the fifth R, reconsideration. Reconsideration is necessary when dealing with difficult history and historical topics. Reconsideration among audience members when learning about difficult

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<sup>57</sup> Rose, Technical Leaflet #255, "Interpreting Difficult Knowledge," 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

history can ultimately be an indicator of “an audience’s further engagement in difficult knowledge.”<sup>60</sup>

While difficult history is not a new phrase, it has been a topic of increasing interest in the last five years. According to English Heritage, a non-profit that manages hundreds of historic properties, sites, and buildings, “since the summer of 2020, history has barely left the headlines. In particular, there has been heartfelt, and often heated, debate about how we commemorate individuals and events of the past, and about the appropriateness of statues and memorials that we have inherited from previous generations,” as history is diverse and interpretation is constantly evolving to provide current and proper contextualization.<sup>61</sup> In response to this state of continuous change, many public historians and educators encourage engagement with history, regardless of the discomfort felt when of facing history, both during learning and teaching, in all its complexities.<sup>62</sup>

Newspapers across the United States continue to highlight the controversy of teaching difficult history or concepts deemed off limits such as critical race theory. In the state of Tennessee, in May 2021, the “Tennessee General Assembly approved a House Education bill which included an amendment that banned teaching any concepts related to race and racism,”

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<sup>60</sup>Rose, Technical Leaflet #255, “Interpreting Difficult Knowledge,” 7.

<sup>61</sup> English Heritage, “Dealing with Difficult History,” N.D., <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/contested-history/>. While this is a website pertaining directly to heritage within the United Kingdom, the concepts of teaching and engaging with current, global events and how the said events both intertwine and are related to controversial or difficult historical events is relevant to issues being addressed globally. All countries have difficult history either through director or indirect connections, and contextualization is key when learning, engaging, and teaching difficult histories.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

further curtailing what classroom educators can and cannot share with students.<sup>63</sup> Many, like Tennessean Guest Columnists Dr. Michelle Christian and Dr. Jioni Lewis, argue that opponents of Critical Race Theory “conflate CRT, an explanatory framework used to understand the structure and ideology of race and racism that emerged out of legal studies, with any analysis of race and racial inequality that accurately describes the country’s history of racism and how it continues to operate today” in attempts to withhold or micromanage the proper education and analyses of difficult histories.<sup>64</sup>

In allowing museums and institutions to bridge the gaps necessary for teaching histories deemed difficult, museum professionals can provide resources to ease the current unrest surrounding challenging topics. For example, the curriculum and research of The 1619 Project, published by the *New York Times* in 2019 and authored by Nikole Hannah-Jones, details the arrival of the first trafficked and enslaved Africans to Virginia. This reframing of history through the lens of the impact of enslavement on American and global history provided a broader foundation for what Americans have been taught about the difficult histories surrounding enslavement and its legacy.

According to the *New York Times*, “The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from *The New York Times Magazine* that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country’s history by placing the

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<sup>63</sup> Natalie Allison, “Tennessee bans public schools from teaching critical race theory amid national debate” *The Tennessean*, 5 May 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Dr. Michelle Christian and Dr. Jioni Lewis, “What lawmakers in Tennessee got wrong about critical race theory: Ultimately, the education bill attempts to prohibit any meaningful discussions of racism, the history of white supremacy, and the power of resistance,” *The Tennessean*, 23 May 2021: H.3.

consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.”<sup>65</sup> Through reframing the narrative surrounding enslavement in America, new educational strategies have emerged, coupled with fear and hesitancy from educators of potential public outcry and disciplinary actions.

The issues of social unrest surrounding racial injustices in America, coupled with the heightened tensions after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in June 2020, led educators and public historians to question how to address the difficult history of racial tensions and relations in American history, inside and outside of the classroom. As educators looked through their social studies curriculum standards, the hot button topics of racial discrimination, injustices, enslavement, imprisonment of minority groups, all loomed heavily.

Quickly, initiatives from outside of the classroom like The 1619 Project and the legal concept of such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) were on the tips of tongues and spinning in conversations across the country. Critics cynically took the foundational ideals of The 1619 Project and Critical Race Theory to bash classroom teachers and social studies curricula in many states. Is addressing difficult history the same as Critical Race Theory? The answer is to that question is a resounding no. Difficult history can address lynching - be it victims from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s or the labor movement in White Appalachia fifty years earlier. Nevertheless, hysteria surrounding teaching and interpreting difficult histories quickly engulfed the nation.

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<sup>65</sup> The 1619 Project, *New York Times*, Nikole Hannah-Jones, et al., Eds, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html> -

In response to The 1619 Project, many lawmakers across the United States quickly organized to address the project and its claims. While some of the responses simply disagreed with the foundational pieces of The 1619 Project, other responses from lawmakers called for immediate cease and desist of the curriculum. In 2020, one United States Senator, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, along with the support of many other Republican lawmakers, went as far as introducing the bill titled “Saving American History Act,” to defund The 1619 Project and ban the teaching of the curriculum in public schools. According to Cotton, the curricula were founded in misinformation and potentially led to students hating America with indoctrination through “Critical Race Theory curricula like the 1619 Project.” Cotton continued by touting the enforcement aspect of this bill - removing federal funding from schools or educators found guilty of teaching using concepts such as Critical Race Theory - and states that “federal funds should not pay for activists to masquerade as teachers and indoctrinate our youth.”<sup>66</sup>

As educators continue to grapple with the constraints of new legislation like the “Saving American History Act,” many feel the tensions building towards eruption. Despite the questions raised for clarification regarding the vaguity of the legislation that sought to ban teaching critical race theory in classrooms, Daniel C. Vock acknowledged that “many Tennessee teachers felt ignored last month when Republican lawmakers passed a law that

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<sup>66</sup> “COTTON, MCCONNELL, COLLEAGUES INTRODUCE BILL TO DEFUND 1619 PROJECT CURRICULUM,” Tom Cotton Senator for Arkansas, 2021. <https://www.cotton.senate.gov/news/press-releases/cotton-mcconnell-colleagues-introduce-bill-to-defund-1619-project-curriculum>

will restrict how they can teach students about racism.”<sup>67</sup> While Tennessee has been widely reported in the news on this topic, similar legislation has been passed across multiple states to ban “the teaching of ‘divisive concepts’ about systemic racism and sexism in U.S. history and society.”<sup>68</sup> As a result of the controversies and legislative action, debates have erupted nationally regarding education and critical race theory. Much of the anger and paranoia in Tennessee stems from the fact that the “law allows the state’s education commissioner to withhold state funding for violations of the policy, but it offers almost no guidance about how to do so.”<sup>69</sup>

Difficult history is multifaceted and spans across topics, contents, and time periods. While teaching, interpreting, and learning from difficult history can cause discomfort. It is the basis for understanding and education. The concept that history does not repeat itself, but it surely rhymes specifically stands out as a nod to the importance of teaching, interpreting, and striving to understand concepts deemed difficult history.<sup>70</sup> If public history does not embark on the work to teach difficult history, we remain ignorant about all of our past.

When defining difficult history and difficult heritage, Joe Watkins outlines in “The Politics of Archaeology,” that “while heritage is many things and has many different definitions,” he continues that “heritage is the product of societies, is inherited, and is often

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel C. Vock, "Teachers come under pressure as politicians, parents battle of ‘critical race theory,’” *Tennessee Lookout*, June 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> The quote “history does not repeat itself, but it surely rhymes” is often attributed to author, Mark Twain.

complex,” and these complexities can lead to cultural, linguistic, and many other types of misinterpretations as a result of heritage preservation and education.<sup>71</sup>

### **What’s So Difficult About History in Appalachia?**

*What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (2018), by East Tennessee public historian Dr. Elizabeth Catte, introduced readers a different perspective on what life in Appalachia entails and how historic myths and misconceptions fuel further misunderstandings of the region. Catte unpacked the popular views on Appalachia in recent years, and addressed how the misguided attempts to shed light on the region have in turn created a very wrong picture of the multifaceted cultures of Appalachia. While Appalachia is a racially and economically diverse region, Catte detailed that for propaganda reasons in the 1960s, the picture of Appalachian poverty rarely included images of Black Appalachians as “public support for the War on Poverty depended on getting white, middle-class Americans to care about poverty, and projections of white poverty worked in this regard.”<sup>72</sup> Difficult history in Appalachia not only stems from racial tensions in the region, but also from public regard and misconceptions of who are and who are not considered the faces of Appalachia. In order to fully understand the difficult histories of Appalachia, one needs to address the complexities of the region and the humanity of the community members. While Dr. Elizabeth Catte’s work addressed Appalachia from a more modern perspective, the issues addressed

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<sup>71</sup> Joe Watkins, “The Politics of Archaeology,” in *Negotiating Culture: Heritage Ownership and Intellectual Property*, ed. Laetitia La Follete, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 18-19.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*, (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018) 82.

and myths often perpetrated are deeply rooted in earlier history of the region regarding race, poverty, and internal conflicts.

Wilma A. Dunaway in *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (2003) wrote that “In 1860, nearly three of every ten adults (Aged fifteen to fifty-nine) in the region’s labor force were enslaved,” further pointing to the significance of enslavement in Appalachia.<sup>73</sup> Dunaway emphasized that enslaved people “were not the only unfree laborers in Southern Appalachia, for laws regulated free blacks in a ways that kept them structurally and economically immobile.”<sup>74</sup> Most families in Appalachia were not enslavers, while in 1860, “nearly 29 percent of all Southern families were slaveholders, while only 18 percent of Appalachian households owned slaves.”<sup>75</sup> This discrepancy across the south, speaks directly to the regional and overall agricultural differences of the Deep South and the Appalachian south. Throughout the state of Tennessee, loyalties remained divided, and even before votes for and against secession in 1861, “in early 1860 the Tennessee General Assembly engaged in a heated debate over a proposal to expel free blacks from the state,” further pointing to the complicated and difficult history surrounding enslavement in the state of Tennessee.<sup>76</sup> In East Tennessee specifically, the votes for secession from the Union in June 1861, remained much more loyal to the Union and anti-secession than the other counties across Middle and West

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<sup>73</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 20).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan M. Atkins “Party Politics and the Debate over the Tennessee Free Negro Bill, 1859-1860.” *The Journal of Southern History*, 71 (No. 2, May 2005), 245

Tennessee. When overlaying the June 1861 county session map with the 1860 census of enslaved populations in the state of Tennessee, one can assume that the voting results were impacted by the enslaved population numbers reported.

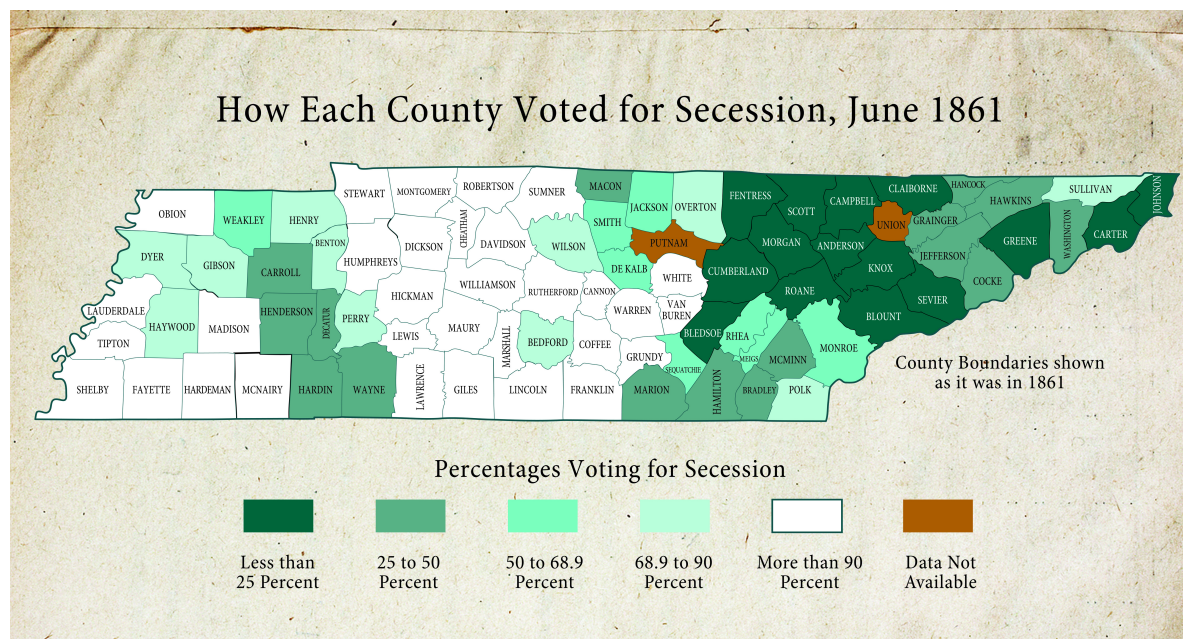


Figure 2. "1860 Secession Vote Map." East Tennessee Historical Society.

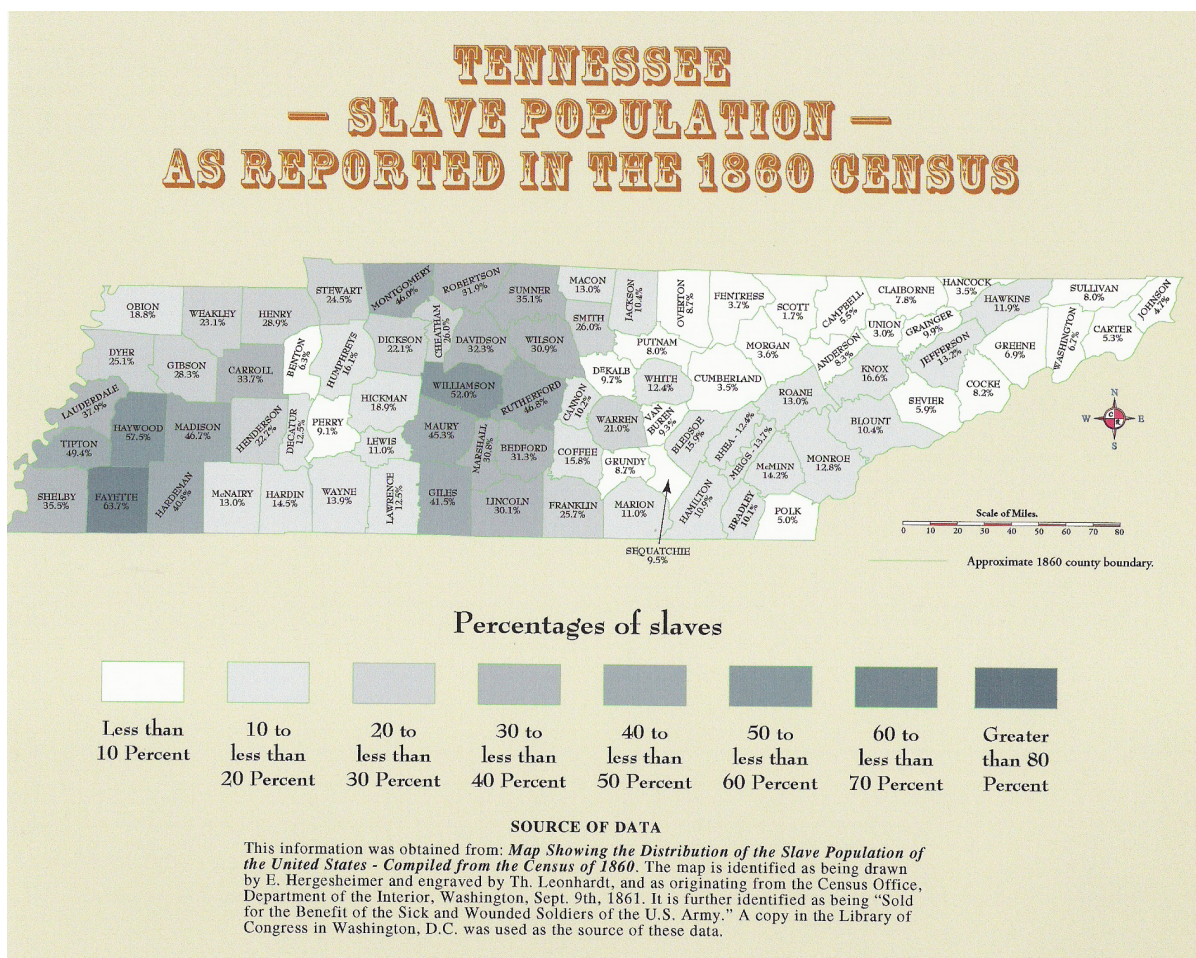


Figure 3. "1860 Slave Population Map for Tennessee." East Tennessee Historical Society.

**Vote on Secession in East Tennessee, June 8, 1861**

<u>County</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Total</u>
Anderson	97	7.1	1,278	92.9	1,375
Bledsoe	197	28.3	500	71.7	697
Blount	418	19.1	1,766	80.9	2,184
Bradley	507	26.8	1,382	73.2	1,889
Campbell	59	5.6	1,000	94.4	1,059
Carter	86	6.0	1,343	94.0	1,429
Claiborne	250	16.7	1,243	83.3	1,493
Cocke	518	30.4	1,185	69.6	1,703
Cumberland		not available		not available	
Grainger	586	28.2	1,492	71.8	2,078
Greene	744	21.7	2,691	78.3	3,435
Hamilton	854	40.4	1,260	59.6	2,114
Hancock	279	30.7	630	69.3	909
Hawkins	908	38.3	1,460	61.7	2,368
Jefferson	603	23.3	1,987	76.7	2,590
Johnson	111	12.4	787	87.6	898
Knox	1,214	27.6	3,196	72.4	4,415
McMinn	904	44.1	1,144	55.9	2,048
Marion	414	40.8	600	59.2	1,014
Meigs	481	64.3	267	35.7	748
Monroe	1,096	58.6	774	41.4	1,870
Morgan	50	7.4	630	92.6	680
Polk	738	70.0	317	30.0	1,055
Rhea	360	64.1	202	35.9	562
Roane	454	22.5	1,568	77.5	2,022
Scott	19	3.5	521	96.5	540

*Figure 4. "Vote on Secession in East Tennessee, June 8, 1861," Page 1, East Tennessee Historical Society.*

An early, valuable study centered on an Appalachian historic house museum is "Interpreting the Frontier Slave Experience: Slavery at Blount Mansion, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1792-1800."<sup>77</sup> Lisa N. Oakley examined through archival documents and material

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<sup>77</sup> Lisa N. Oakley, "Interpreting the Frontier Slave Experience: Slavery at Blount Mansion, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1792-1800," M.A. Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1993.

culture the lives of people who lived at Blount Mansion and were enslaved by the first Territorial Governor of Tennessee, William Blount. Oakley addressed the need for interpreting difficult history in Knoxville and Appalachia, pointing to the importance of accurately and inclusively interpreting enslaved experiences and African American lives and culture during the early frontier and Tennessee statehood periods. In building upon the influences of the 1960s new social history movement and incorporating new-to-the-time strategies and best practices, Oakley's thesis proved to be groundbreaking, much needed research for Knoxville and Appalachia regionally.

Oakley urged new approaches at Blount Mansion similar to those at Colonial Williamsburg in the early to mid-1990s to incorporate sharing more inclusive narratives within their larger interpretations. In her work, Oakley called for the continued cooperation between those in the strictly academic world and public historians, and hoped for future collaboration to continue to uncover and educate the general public, as well as to guide new research, education, and interpretation.<sup>78</sup>

Contemporary with Oakley's work, Dr. Charles Faulkner, an archeologist at the University of Tennessee, delved into the complicated history of land usage, ownership, and settlement during early statehood, specifically in East Tennessee. Dr. Faulkner studied the

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<sup>78</sup> Lisa N. Oakley, "Interpreting the Frontier Slave Experience: Slavery at Blount Mansion, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1792-1800," M.A. Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1993. I am extremely grateful to the leadership, guidance, and expertise of Lisa Oakley. She likes to joke that she is the institutional knowledge and memory of the East Tennessee Historical Society, but, all jokes aside, the statement is completely true. The ETHS, East Tennessee history, and public history and historiography regionally, are indebted to the research and academic contributions of Lisa Oakley.

multi-faceted Ramsey House and led over two decades of archaeological digs and investigations. In *The Ramseys at Swan Pond* (2008), Dr. Faulkner reported findings for many excavations. Results uncovered through excavation efforts and primary source research uncovered the rich history of this East Tennessee land, and the stories of the people who inhabited the region over centuries.<sup>79</sup> Faulkner painted a picture using archaeological evidence, and what he referred to as backyard archeology, of earliest peoples and settlements, white settlers, enslaved African Americans, and inhabitants well in to the twentieth century and used material culture and archeological evidence to speak where silences loomed. Faulkner's research represented the depth of history and stories that can be uncovered when written evidence proves to be sparse. While *The Ramsey's at Swan Pond* reported numerous archeological excavations, Dr. Faulkner connected the findings with the primary sources available for the family and the region, and emphasized the relationships between thorough historic research and properly contextualized archeological excavations.

Some wrongly assume that the deeply intricate Appalachian identities are a monolith, but the people, lands, and stories range in diversity, and provide in-depth examples of how regional history varies and belongs to many. Appalachian history spans across generations and peoples, beginning with the Indigenous peoples who first lived and settled on the rolling hills and mountains. European settlers arrived in the sixteenth century and set in motion a turn of events that would change the cultural landscape and identities of what would eventually become the state of Tennessee. As white settlers moved into the region, population

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Faulkner, *The Ramseys at Swan Pond: The Archaeology and History of an East Tennessee Farm*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008)

demographics shifted, competition for resources increased, and United States government policies resulted in the Indigenous populations migrated further west through forced migration through the Trail of Tears or through instances of voluntary removal throughout the region. As settlers poured into the region, the institution of enslavement expanded across the region, impacting the economic, social, and political atmosphere of the region. While the difficult early history that ultimately shaped Appalachia and the region of East Tennessee is often overlooked, it is the job of museum professionals and public historians to address the past, and to interpret the difficult history of enslavement and Indigenous removal accurately and inclusively.

## CHAPTER THREE: INTERPRETING DIFFICULT HISTORY IN APPALACHIA

### THE EAST TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY (ETHS)

As a result of my residency and work with the East Tennessee Historical Society, including the review of how small to medium-sized institutions approach master planning and re-evaluation of content displayed to the general public, I began researching other comparable medium-sized museums in Appalachia. As the ETHS navigated and addressed its responsibilities to the public in interpreting difficult histories inclusively, I analyzed the processes of a medium-sized institution addressing and righting instances of erasure and/or silence in collections, exhibitions, and educational outreach efforts. After the initial documentation period, I began to compare the compiled data to other state and regional institutions within Appalachia. The data and research related to the educational programming and re-evaluation proved to be invaluable to my research and my dissertation.

The current mission of the East Tennessee Historical Society is “to preserve, interpret and promote the history of Tennessee, focusing on East Tennessee, in order to educate and connect the region, its people, history, culture and heritage.”<sup>80</sup> While this mission statement has been met in many ways, the East Tennessee Historical Society, as an institutional entity, understands and acknowledges that there are remaining areas for improvement regarding full representation of all community members of East Tennessee. In addition to re-evaluating

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<sup>80</sup> This is the mission statement of the East Tennessee Historical Society located in Knoxville, Tennessee. While this has been the mission statement and goal of the ETHS since its beginning, the way the East Tennessee community has been served and the stories have been told have varied over time and speak to the silences and systems of power not only in East Tennessee at the local and state level, but also at the national level.

physical exhibitions, the education team is working towards reviewing and editing educational materials, including teacher texts, student materials, lesson plans, and other essential educator materials. This reworking will include the evaluation of language to reflect and address the shifts in language (ex: slave v. enslaved person, slave owner v. enslaver) as sources and research have continued to evolve.

Originally founded as the East Tennessee Antiquarian Society in 1834, the East Tennessee Historical Society is deeply rooted in regional history and telling the story of the entire region of East Tennessee. The Museum of East Tennessee History, opened in 1993 and revamped in 2008, is located in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee, but interprets and exhibits stories of all 35 counties of the East Tennessee region. The Museum of East Tennessee History is housed in the East Tennessee History Center along with the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection (of the Knox County Libraries) and the Knox County Archives. The East Tennessee Historical Society has survived many iterations and now serves as a hub for research, history, and community for the region.<sup>81</sup>

The East Tennessee Antiquarian Society's founding members included notable names and families in East Tennessee history such as Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey, Thomas Humes, John Crozier, and Judge William Reese. The founding members argued that preserving early Tennessee history as it was, was a dire need. Much like the state of Tennessee, the East Tennessee Antiquarian proved to be quite divided regarding Civil War loyalties. Ramsey,

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<sup>81</sup> W. Todd Groce, "East Tennessee Historical Society," Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/east-tennessee-historical-society/>.

who held much of the society's records, papers, and history, was a supporter of the Confederate States of America, while Humes was a staunch Unionist and against secession. As the nation descended into war, the East Tennessee Antiquarian Society crumbled into disrepair for decades. There was an attempt to revive the Society in the late nineteenth century, but it proved to be short-lived.<sup>82</sup>

In the 1920s, the renewed and rebranded East Tennessee Historical Society, acquired and moved into the Reconstruction-era Custom House building on the corners of Clinch Avenue and Gay Street in downtown, Knoxville. With community and government support, the East Tennessee Historical Society made the Custom House a permanent home for regional history. The Custom House is listed on the National Register for Historic Places, and it the home for the East Tennessee History Center and ETHS's Museum of East Tennessee History. In 2001, the East Tennessee History Center received funding and widespread support to update interpretation and programming and to expand the Custom House facility.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> W. Todd Groce, "East Tennessee Historical Society," Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/east-tennessee-historical-society/>.

<sup>83</sup> Fred Brown, "Past Settles In," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, October 13, 2004.

# PAST SETTLES IN

## Expanded East Tennessee History Center will be 'a showplace for the region's history'

In about a month, Knoxville and the region will have a new house of history.



**FRED BROWN**  
Appalachian  
Journal

The historic Custom House, built in 1874 and expanded in 1910, did not only get a modern face-lift, but it has also expanded again. Instead of 50,000 square feet, the latest addition adds another 56,000 square feet. The new building that has been going up on Gay Street for the past three years is five floors and made of matching marble.

Thanks to about \$172 million in funding from Knox County and \$1 million from the city of Knoxville, patrons of the region's history, the East Tennessee Historical Society, the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, the Knox County Archives, the Sons of the Revolution and the ETHS Museum will have a wondrous place to work, study, research and educate the area's children about East Tennessee and its importance in the vanguard of the nation's westward expansion.

Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale says it is already obvious from attendance numbers at the 9/11 exhibit (which ran from January to May and was the first exhibit for the new building staged in the auditorium) that the History Center is going to play a key role in downtown Knoxville.

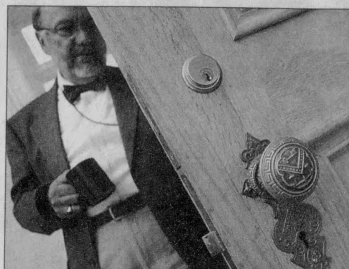
"That exhibit from the Smithsonian in Washington drew more than 53,000 visitors. That is an indication of future success," Ragsdale says.

"It is critically important that we preserve the traditions and heritage of this region, and the East Tennessee History Center will allow us to do that. There is just a tremendous amount of interest in the center in Knox and surrounding counties," he says.

"We are excited about it being a cultural and learning center for our community. This was an investment, and the return on that investment is tremendous when you look at the number of people who have already been there. That initial exhibit speaks of the potential the center has."

The East Tennessee History Center at 601 S. Gay St., in the heart of the city, has remained open for most of the construction period, which began Sept. 10, 2001. But now it will throw open its newest sections to the public in mid- to late November. A grand opening is planned for the spring.

Amazingly, the building's historic insides, its Greco-Roman decorations, moldings, corbels, original ceiling de-



Where possible, original brass doorknobs have been found and put on office doors of the East Tennessee History Center.

says. The sections, he says, will explore East Tennessee's history in the Civil War, Reconstruction, the economic and social changes after the war, marble mining, timber, music and the impact of the federal government on the region in much the same manner as the Virginia Historic Society's Museum takes its visitors on a stroll through pre-colonial and colonial times to the present.

Toomey says one of the real treats of the exhibit is the building itself. It is historic, and the designers "left the feel of the building." Some of the text panels will be in the windows so that they appear to be backlit.

Those who visited the old history museum will recognize the exhibit, but it has been reworked and put into sections around capital-capped load-bearing steel columns that are part of the original Custom House.

Other features of the new building include a climate-controlled room for McClung's historic photographic collection and negatives.

It also includes a state-of-the-art darkroom. A refurbished museum shop is already open.

"This will be a showplace for the region's history," says Chere Henderson, ETHS interim director.

In this case, history is repeating itself. And that's a good thing.

Senior writer Fred Brown may be reached at 865-342-6427.



Steve Cotham, executive director for the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, and Chere Henderson, the East Tennessee Historical Society interim acting director, tour the new home for the ETHS.

PHOTOS BY AMY SMOTHERMAN/NEWS SENTINEL

Figure 5. "Past Settles In," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 13 Oct 2004.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Fred Brown, "Past Settles In," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, October 13, 2004. This Clipping from the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* details the early 2000s era renovations on the historic Custom House and East Tennessee History Center.



*Figure 6. “East Tennessee Historical Society.” Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*

Over the last decade, despite the constraints of a global pandemic, the East Tennessee Historical Society has grown exponentially and continues to focus heavily on local and regional outreach programs and opportunities. The East Tennessee Historical Society currently has twelve Officers, seventeen Board Members, nine Honoraries, one Ex-Officio, and seventeen staff members.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “2022-2023 ETHS Board Members & Staff Listing,” East Tennessee Historical Society, 2022.

## **2022-2023 ETHS Board Members & Staff Listing**

### **2022-2023 Officers**

*Chairman:* Joe E. Thompson III

*Vice Chairmen:*

*Knoxville Area:* John Thurman

*Northeast Tennessee:* Imogene King

*Southeast Tennessee:* Maury Nicely

*Recording Secretary:* David W. Mink

*Treasurer:* David Reynolds

*Past Chairman:* E. Jerome Melson

*Manager, McClung Collection:* Eric Dawson

*Knox County Representative:* Glenn Jacobs

*City of Knoxville Representative:* LaKenya Middlebrook

*Legal Counsel:* Eddy Pratt

*Community Relations Consultant:* Susan Richardson Williams

### **Board Members**

Sam J. Albritton III

Charles E. Atchley Jr

Kreis Beall

Cindi DeBusk

Erin Burns Freeman

R. Scott Hussey PhD

Robert Marquis

Matthew McClellan

Jordan Mollenhour

Carroll Ross

John A. Sibley

D. Ray Smith

Hubert Smith

Brenda Wood Tombras

Greg A. Vital

Wilhelmina Williams

Eleanor Yoakum

### **Honorary**

Jane Creed

Natalie L. Haslam

Dr. Anthony Hodges

Marvin House

Sherri P. Lee

Carrington Montague

Joe E. Spence

Joseph Swann

Jack E. Williams

### **Ex-Officio**

Malcolm Rogers

### **Staff**

*President/CEO:* A. Warren Dockter PhD

*Vice President & Curator of Education:* Lisa N. Oakley

*Education Program Manager:* Dani Manley Hood  
*Curator of Collections:* Rebecca P'Simer  
*Director of Development:* Gay Henry Lyons PhD  
*Development Consultant:* Susan Arp  
*Marketing & Digital Content Manager:* Ken Mayes  
*Community Engagement Manager:* Kelley Weatherley-Sinclair  
*Director of Administration:* Stephanie Henry  
*Administrative & Development Assistant:* Jamie Holt  
*Financial Manager:* Rudy E. McBee  
*Museum Shop Manager & Guest Services:* Tim Yates  
*Guest Services:* Alicia Peery  
*Gallery Associate & Guest Services:* Hannah Hudson  
*Gallery Associate & Guest Services:* Jonathan Jones  
*Editor, Tennessee Ancestors:* Ann K. Blomquist  
*Editor, The Journal of East Tennessee History:* Aaron D. Purcell PhD

*Assistant Director for Historical Services, Knox County Public Library/East Tennessee History Center:* Adam Alfrey

In 2022, ETHS was awarded between \$150,000 and \$175,000 in grant funding, and in 2023 the budget is currently showing around \$200,000 of potential grant funding, and numbers for the 2022-2023 budget continue to trend upward.<sup>86</sup> As the larger of the regional museum case studies in this dissertation, in addition to being in a more urban area of East Tennessee, the East Tennessee Historical Society is working with a much bigger budget, a larger staff, and greater access to resources than other small-to medium-sized regional history museums and institutions.

My doctoral residency with the East Tennessee Historical Society took place during a time of internal, institutional transition and during a pivotal time of change within the public history and museum field. Many conversations about this transition with East Tennessee Historical Society (ETHS) leadership further shaped my study. I shifted additional attention to the regional institutional responsibilities to the general public when exhibiting difficult historical topics, material culture items, and historical trauma and exploring the silences in current interpretation practices. The institutional shifts with the ETHS allowed for an opportunity to document the beginnings of this process of re-evaluation, as “regional museums often play an important role in the communities in which their [they’re] housed.”<sup>87</sup>

The East Tennessee Historical Society often has been at the forefront of curriculum and professional development opportunities for educators statewide. In 2003, the East Tennessee

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<sup>86</sup> “2023 Budget,” East Tennessee Historical Society, 2023.

<sup>87</sup> Rosa Cartagena and Sydney Mahan, “How History Museums Have Presented the African American Experience,” *Washingtonian Media*, September 2016, <https://www.washingtonian.com/2016/09/23/regional-museums-that-have-helped-sculpt-narratives-on-african-american-history/>.

Historical Society and selected classroom educators in East Tennessee were awarded a Teaching American History Grant for “Enduring Visions: Historical Views of Americans and Their Worlds.” The initial grant in 2003, grew to a much larger project serving eleven school districts, and stretching across a decade. Content created with local educators, and the University of Tennessee’s History Department, and ETHS staff was implemented to meet educator needs to grow history education through professional development opportunities and content resources for teaching American History.<sup>88</sup> As outlined in the initial Teaching American History Grant proposal, there was a great need among East Tennessee educators for high-quality, primary source-based, and standards aligned professional development opportunities. As reported (see Figure 7), the need among East Tennessee educators was a main emphasis of the initial grant proposal.

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<sup>88</sup> “Enduring Visions: Historical Views of Americans and Their World,” Grant proposal for Teaching American History grants awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society. 2010, e5.

### III. NEED FOR PROJECT

Project evaluators conducted a needs assessment through surveys, meetings, and telephone interviews with all three districts. The goal of this data gathering that began in April of 2009 was to identify training needs, areas of concern for student academic performance, and specific teacher content and instructional needs in teaching American history that the TAH professional development would address. Based on administrator responses, the following are the major **teacher needs** that will be addressed through the TAH professional development: 1) there is little or no professional development in American history currently offered for teachers in these districts; 2) there is a need to improve the content and pedagogy skills for teachers with low student achievement in American History; 3) there is a need to address quality of instruction and retention for American history teachers who have been teaching for less than 5 years.

**Figure 3.1**  
**District Administrator Assessment Results for Teacher Professional Development Needs**  
**In American History for 63 pre-qualified teachers**

Need	Reported Number of Teachers with this Need	%
Do not have access to professional development in American history	63	100%
Have low student achievement in social studies/U.S. History	37	59%
Do not have a college degree in history	27	43%
Have a poor foundation in content	37	59%
Are not certified in history	37	59%
Have been teaching for less than 5 years	27	43%
Have been teaching for more than 20 years	8	13%
Do not have access to technology or do not use technology	22	35%
Do not participate in National History Day	34	54%
Would benefit by linking history to literacy	53	84%
Need to learn how to match curriculum to state standards	44	70%
Would benefit from working in teams	63	100%

*Figure 7. Excerpt from "Enduring Visions: Historical Views of Americans and Their World" Teaching American History grants awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society. East Tennessee Historical Society.*

The culmination of this massive endeavor resulted in the East Tennessee Historical Society and the University of Tennessee Knoxville receiving a final Teaching American History “Enduring Visions” grant in 2010. The Enduring Visions grant spanned to 2014, included multiple statewide partnerships including National History Day and the Library of Congress’ Teaching with Primary Sources through the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, and coordinated professional development opportunities for for over sixty pre-qualified educators.

The key goals of the four-year plan for the “Enduring Visions” grant as outlined in the intent portion of the proposal included:

1. improve teachers’ knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of traditional American history content, which will build confidence in their ability to teach American history;
2. increase capacity of participating LEAs to improve traditional American history professional development based on teachers’ needs in American history content;
3. increase teachers’ use of the founding documents of this nation, primary sources, local history resources, technology tools, NHD, and other research-based teaching strategies;
4. and increase students’ understanding of and proficiency in American history.<sup>89</sup>

The “Teaching American History Enduring Visions” grant allowed for East Tennessee partners to create partnerships that in turn laid the foundation for continuing educator networking in Anderson, Sevier, and Union County school systems. After months of

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<sup>89</sup> “Enduring Visions: Historical Views of Americans and Their World,” grant proposal for Teaching American History grants awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society. 2010, e0.

planning, coordinating, and implementing the partners involved shared and presented resources in professional development sessions and a summer educator institute. As a result of the funding and labor from the “Teaching American History Enduring Visions” grant, the web domain [teachamericanhistory.org](http://teachamericanhistory.org) was created. After 2014, all of the original content created through Enduring Visions was migrated to a different web domain under the supervision of the East Tennessee History Society.

The original content that populated this website [[teachtnhistory.org](http://teachtnhistory.org)] prior to fall 2014 was developed during three Teaching American History Grants (2003-2014). The web domain name at that until the revision was TeachAmericanHistory and the materials were correlated to the 2001 Tennessee social studies curriculum, some of which related to Tennessee and local history (particularly in the History Kit). All of these materials are found under the TeachAmericanHistory page.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> East Tennessee Historical Society, “Teach American History: More, More, More!,” <https://teachtnhistory.org/index.cfm/m/198/sectionId/0/TeachAmericanHistory/>.

*Enduring Visions: Historical Views of Americans and Their World*

The *Enduring Visions* Teaching American History (TAH) Grant consortium includes Anderson, Sevier, and Union County Tennessee Schools. Anderson County Schools is the lead LEA. Primary partners are the East Tennessee Historical Society, providing project direction, and the University of Tennessee (UT) Department of History, providing quality traditional American history instruction. Additional partners are UT's Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature, the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, the Knox County Archives, and Tennessee affiliates of the Library of Congress' Teaching with Primary Sources and National History Day (NHD) programs. *Enduring Visions* will provide quality professional development for 63 pre-qualified 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. The project has four key goals: 1) improve teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of traditional American history content, which will build confidence in their ability to teach American history; 2) increase capacity of participating LEAs to improve traditional American history professional development based on teachers' needs in American history content; 3) increase teachers' use of the founding documents of this nation, primary sources, local history resources, technology tools, NHD, and other research-based teaching strategies; 4) and increase students' understanding of and proficiency in American history. The centerpiece of the project is a series of six-hour academic year mini-institutes; teachers will complete an annual Professional Development Plan including these 24 hours. In addition they will choose a minimum of 16 hours from a menu of 2-day and summer travel institutes and pedagogy-based activities such as curriculum development and use of student achievement data. The topics covered during the project will address key content needs across the ten curriculum eras from exploration through current day. The successes of *Enduring Visions* will be shared with all teachers in the region and nation through the project's freely accessible website [www.teachamericanhistory.org](http://www.teachamericanhistory.org).

*Figure 8. Excerpts from “Enduring Visions: Historical Views of Americans and Their World” Teaching American History grants awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society. East Tennessee Historical Society.*

This success of the Teaching American History grants, including the Enduring Visions grant, eventually led to the creation of a full time Education Program Manager position for

the East Tennessee Historical Society, and the role that was my doctoral residency position and job post-residency. This role encouraged board members to expand the job duties of and allowed for a much bigger education team to serve educators across dozens of counties, connect virtually and in-person statewide alongside partners, and expand the mission of the East Tennessee Historical Society. The education team led by Vice President and Curator of Education, Lisa Oakley, has always been fueled by an innovative spirit and helped to spur the programs into a future of educational programming during the uncertainty of a global pandemic and unprecedented change.

When I began my residency with the East Tennessee Historical Society in 2021, I thought myself to be somewhat familiar with the institution and the educational offerings. After stepping into the role as the Education Program Manager, I realized that working as a public historian and for a non-profit institution required the wearing of many metaphorical hats. The work of regional institutions like the East Tennessee Historical Society is never finished, and I quickly learned that partnerships and connections are truly what make regional museums and institutions successful. Under the direction of Lisa Oakley and Dr. Warren A. Dockter, I was exposed to work grounded in tradition and community that simultaneously encouraged change, inclusivity, and diversity. For example, community Brown Bag lectures for the East Tennessee Historical Society often promoted the work and speeches of local and state historians, authors, and other community members. Additionally, the eager involvement of the ETHS to participate in local and regional events such as the Washington County Annual Heritage Fair, Knoxville literacy programs, Knox County and statewide educator professional development sessions and institutes, and other community

events, further emphasized for all staff how deep local and regional roots run. Working under the direction of Lisa Oakley, I learned how vital it is for public historians to listen to the needs and concerns of local educators, community members, and partner organizations.

In addition to working to serve East Tennesseans and promote regional history, ETHS staff and board members work directly with other community stakeholders and ensure that all can come to the table. While working with the Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation, I was introduced to the phrase boots on the ground by my mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Carroll Van West. This term in the field of historic preservation, to my understanding, means showing up and doing the work alongside community partners and stakeholders. As public historians, it is not our job to simply tell or interpret the history for community members, we are tasked with listening, learning, and engaging. This boots on the ground mentality has continued to follow me throughout my doctoral career and experiences, and as a result, I learned how to serve and work alongside my East Tennessee and statewide partners and to fill the gaps as and when needed.

The East Tennessee Historical Society works tirelessly to engage with scholars and those within the communities through surveys, educational programs, public programs, and rotating exhibits. ETHS has been a long-standing example of what regional history museums are capable of, and continues to represent the entire region of East Tennessee in exhibitions, programming, and interpretation.



Figure 9. "History center's 'Voices' exhibit gets \$2.5 M grant." *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Knoxville, Tennessee, 02 Jul 2006.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Doug Mason, "History center's 'Voices' exhibit gets \$2.5 M grant," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, July 2, 2006. This newspaper clipping is from the Knoxville News-Sentinel, and details the \$2.5 million grant awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society in 2006 by the state of Tennessee to continue to develop the "Voices of the Land" exhibit that was previously started with a \$300,000 grant awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

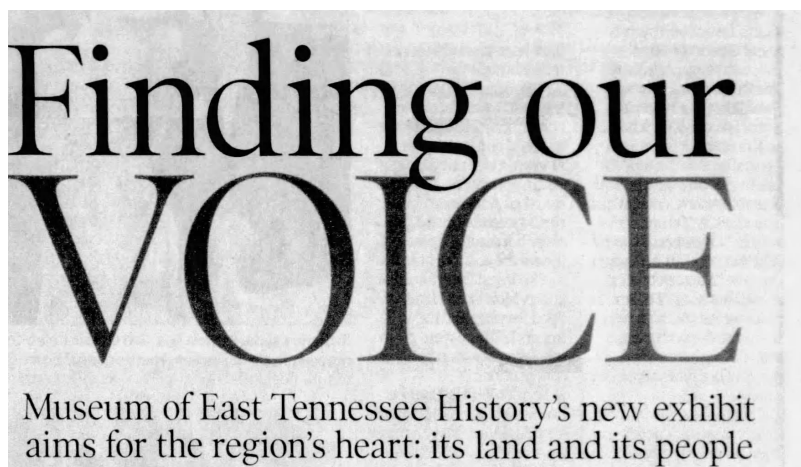


Figure 10. "Finding our VOICE." *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Knoxville, Tennessee, 17 Aug 2008.<sup>92</sup>

The major, permanent exhibit at the Museum of East Tennessee History, "Voices of the Land," has remained in place without major exhibition updates since its original installation in 2007 and opening in 2008. "Voices of the Land" traces the regional history and highlights stories of East Tennessee. The Voices of the Land gallery is split into five different exhibition groupings and encourages visitors to interpret and evaluate the sources presented in a self-guided fashion. Visitors first encounter a space with nature scenes and a mural of faces of East Tennesseans. The "Voices of the Land" exhibition has five specific themes throughout the permanent gallery space. The first part of the "Voices" is focused on the people and stories of East Tennessee. In this section includes a mural of photographs of East Tennesseans, as well as images that highlight the land and resources of the region.

As visitors enter the content area of the museum, they are introduced to the earliest voices of the land, including the Indigenous stories and cultures. The next part of "Voices"

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<sup>92</sup> Amy McCrary, "Finding our VOICE," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, August 17, 2008. This newspaper clipping details the grand opening of the "Voices of the Land" exhibition at the East Tennessee History Center in 2008.

speaks to sectional tensions regarding the institution of enslavement within East Tennessee, and addresses economic, social, and political issues confronted as the state was on the heels of a civil war. This section continues to highlight the state and region as it navigated the Reconstruction era. The fourth section of “Voices” addresses the advances in Appalachia regarding industrialization efforts such as factories and mills in cities and mining and logging industries in more rural areas. The fifth and final section of the permanent exhibition provides visitors with an in depth look at country music influences, the impact of the New Deal on Appalachians, and the progress of the those within the region throughout the twentieth century.

In the early 2000s, when historians and curators initially conducted and reviewed the research, and upon opening in 2008, the information presented through the “Voices of the Land” exhibition was up-to-date according to scholarship and best practices of museum interpretation. While much of the interpretation and exhibition content is still relevant, the language and interpretation shifts regarding institutional responsibility to interpret difficult history has continued to shift. The interpretation and exhibitions of “Voices of the Land” remain from the original 2008 installation, but the recent grants awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society are informing updated interpretation of and research regarding difficult history.



Figure 11. “The Land Beckons,” interpretive panel at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

The interpretive panels in the beginning of “Voices” transition from the picturesque nature scenes of East Tennessee. The part of “Voices of the Land” that speaks to early Tennessee history is titled, “The People of East Tennessee” and begins by introducing the early Indigenous presence of the tribes such as the Tanasi, Toqua, and Chilhowee who directly impacted the formations of states and cultures as “many of this ancient region’s melodious place names came from the people who lived here as long as 12,000 years ago.”<sup>93</sup> The interpretation continues on to weave a narrative focused on Cherokee culture and towns.

<sup>93</sup> “Area 2.1 The Earliest Voices of Land / G-2.01.01 / Teaching Panel,” East Tennessee Historical Society, Exhibition Panels, 2008.



Throughout the earliest section of “Voices,” Indigenous stories and cultures are mentioned mainly through the stories of settlement, trade, and conflict with the early white settlers. The Cherokee tribal bands throughout East Tennessee are, understandably, focused on the most in “Voices” with regards to Indigenous influences, and the original interpretation pointed to the high levels of interaction between diverse cultures. Much original exhibition narrative focuses on Indigenous men and the intertwinement of their stories with white, male settlers. Women receive less attention.

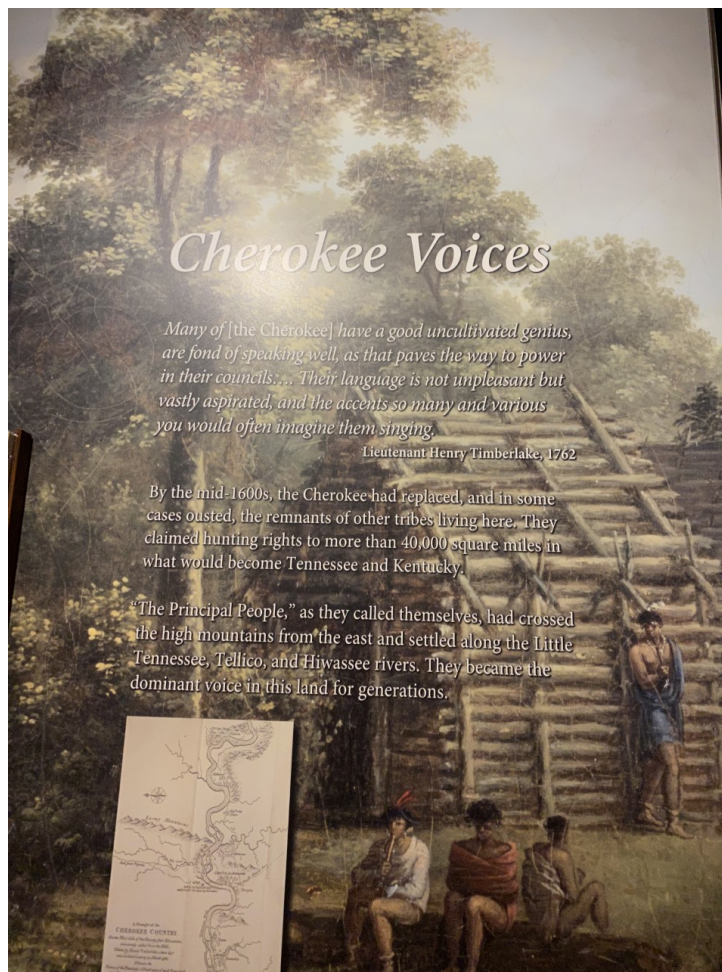


Figure 14. “Cherokee Voices,” interpretive panel at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

In addition to sharing an audio recording of the Cherokee language, this section of “Voices” also includes representations of Cherokee life such as living structures, and places a great emphasis on cultural identity. The interactions between white settlers and the cultural exchanges that took place as a result of co-existing in the regional are also interpreted.

The panel titled “Cherokee Values through Visitors’ Eyes” provides visitors with contemporary to early settlement accounts from missionary to the Cherokee such as Reverend William Richardson in 1758, and Lieutenant Henry Timberlake in 1762. Reverend Richardson’s account reflected the bias of his age - such as the assumed savagery of the Cherokee tribal members and he claimed, “the children are always armed with bows and arrows. War is their profession and they cannot be easy without it.” Lieutenant Timberlake’s account was not as bellicose. He addressed the differences in gender roles regarding the rights of Cherokee women regarding war or council appointments (see Figure 15).

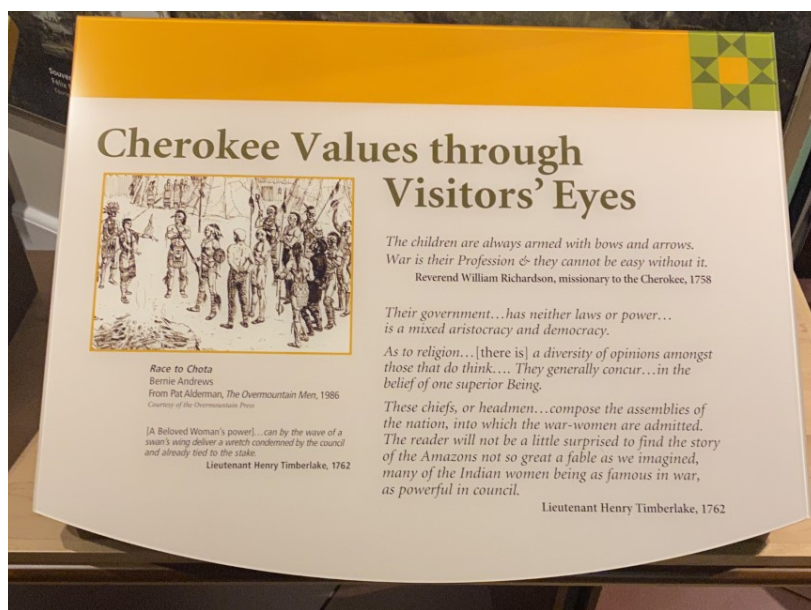


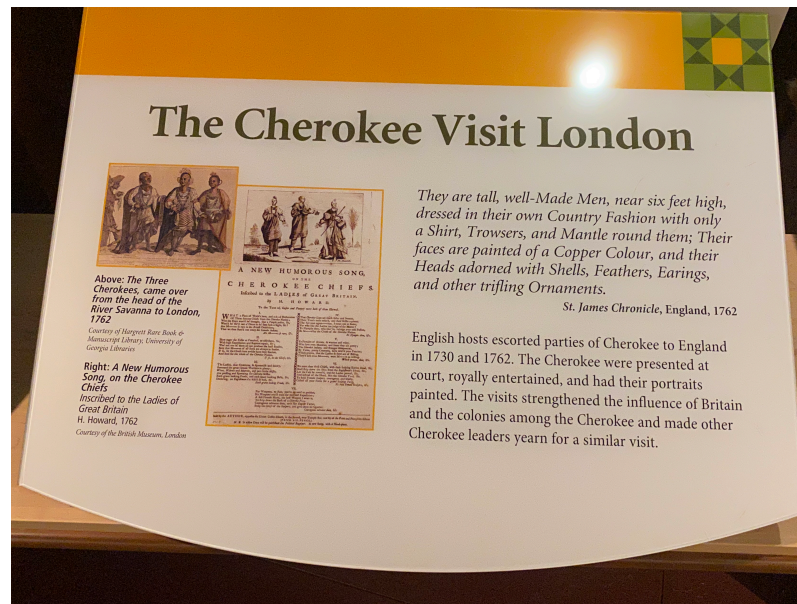
Figure 15. “Cherokee Values through Visitors’ Eyes,” interpretive panel at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

The two accounts provide examples of views from white settlers and missionaries in the eighteenth century regarding interactions with Indigenous tribes of what would become East Tennessee. The interpretative panel allows for contemporary accounts of settlers, but current displays do not speak to the accounts of the Cherokee. This section would benefit from an corresponding interpretative panel that features Cherokee accounts of early interactions with white settlers. While the Cherokee Nation did not officially establish a written language until the early nineteenth century, the voices and stories could potentially still be traced by analyzing oral testimonies taken during the Richardson and Timberlake periods.

The Museum of East Tennessee History does acknowledge the cross continent interactions and cultural exchanges as the English settlers and explorers “escorted parties of Cherokee to England in 1730 and 1762. The interpretive panel continues that “the Cherokee were presented at court, royally entertained, and had their portraits painted.” *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (2016), addressed Indigenous travel to and in London, and specifically highlighted the Cherokee experiences and cultural exchanges in the chapter “Alive from America.”<sup>94</sup> As the East Tennessee Historical Society continues to work through exhibition and interpretative updates to tell a more inclusive Cherokee history, consulting *Indigenous London* and similar publishings will help expand for future interpretation efforts.

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<sup>94</sup> Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).



*Figure 16. “The Cherokee Visit London,” interpretive panel at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

The section of “Voices” that addressed the early settlement and interactions between white settlers and Indigenous tribes highlights artifacts such as the Cherokee Work Basket, tools, jewelry, and other examples of material culture for visitors to browse. The artifacts displayed allowed for a small glimpse of life pre-white settlement in Appalachia for Indigenous tribes, including the Cherokee peoples.

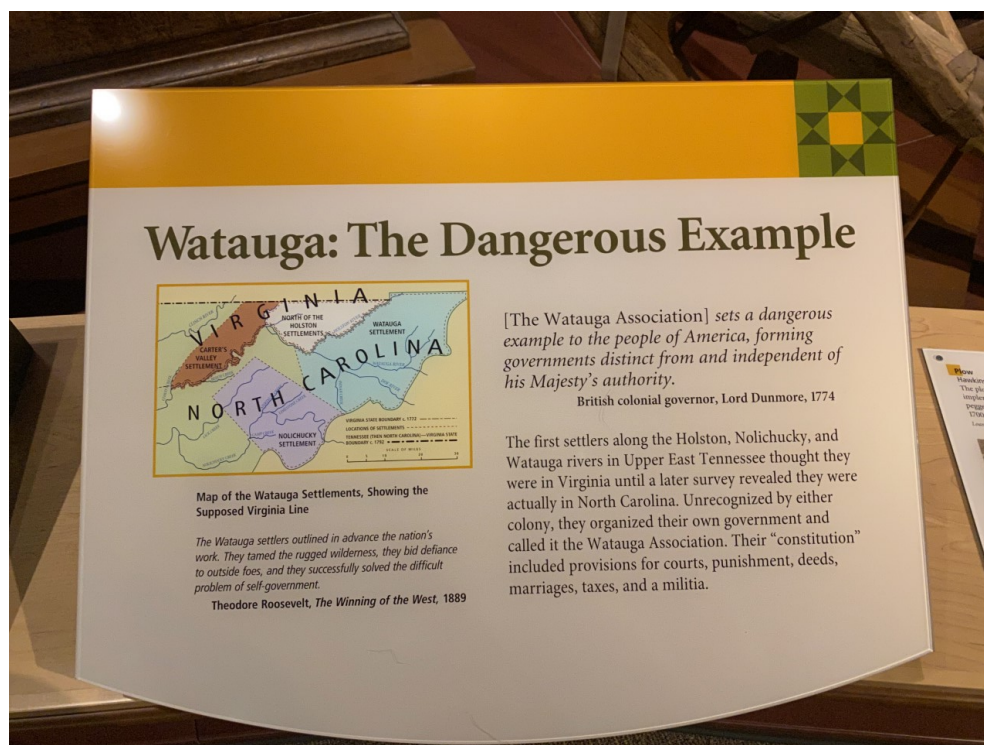
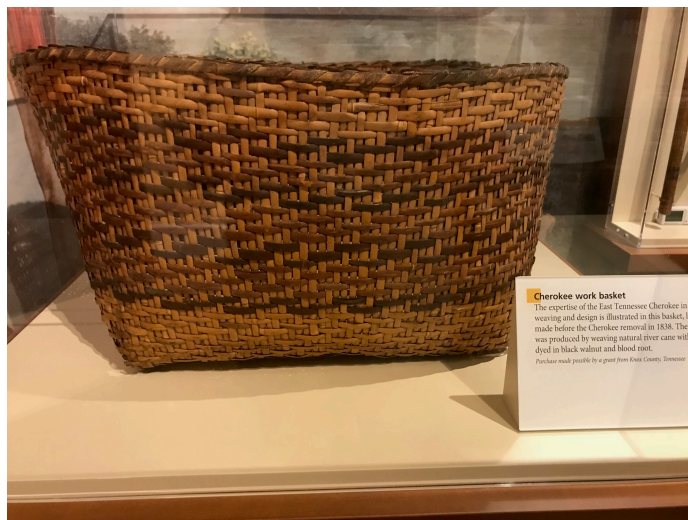


Figure 17. "Watauga: The Dangerous Example," interpretive panel at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

The interpretation of Cherokee history within the larger context of white settler history is continuously weaved throughout the early settlement section of "Voices." Interpreted through artifacts gifted to settlers by Cherokee tribal members, the sides chosen for the French and Indian War, or maps of settlement that allow visitors to visualize the continuous encroachment on ancestral Cherokee lands, the Cherokee story is highlighted in relation to settlement patterns, conflicts, and cultural and geographical expansion of white settlers who left paper trails that truly allude to the power and production of history in the region.

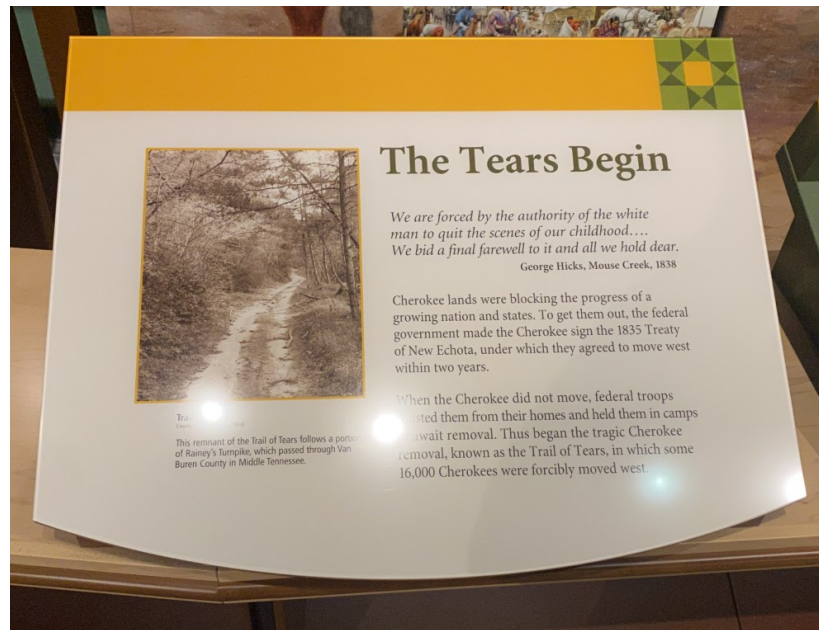


*Figure 18. "Cherokee Work Basket" on display at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*

The interpretation of some of the artifacts in "Voices" can be hard to locate. In each part of "Voices" there are many interpretative books displayed with very specific exhibit text about labeled artifacts displayed and stories shared. While these exhibition texts are extremely informative, many visitors miss key elements of interpretation because of the work that is required to access the information. Including a more detailed museum experience guide, or adding a bit more direction within the actual "Voices of the Land" exhibit could potentially help visitors locate the information more easily.

The information in "Voices of the Land" that outlined the Trail of Tears and the history of Cherokee Removal in East Tennessee is quite extensive, but the placement of much of the information makes it seem as if the difficult history is not completely addressed. The interpretive panel titled "The Tears Begin" provides some context for the forced removal of the Cherokee tribes in East Tennessee. While the panel does feature the quote from George Hicks who detailed the devastation for being forcibly removed from ancestral lands, the text

continues, “Cherokee lands were blocking the progress of a growing nation and states,” and somewhat disregards the complex and difficult history leading up to the Trail of Tears, however, the text at the bottom of the interpretive panel does address that “some 16,000 Cherokees were forcibly moved west” on the Trail of Tears.



*Figure 19. “The Tears Begin,” interpretive panel from Trail of Tears section of interpretation at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

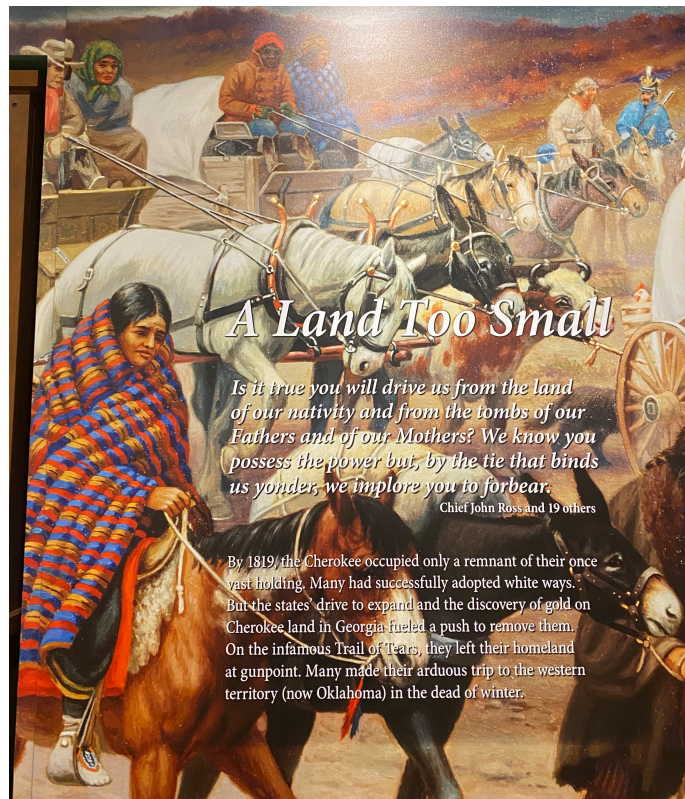


Figure 20 and Figure 21. “A Land Too Small,” mural wall and exhibition from Trail of Tears section of interpretation at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.



As the story continues to unfold in this specific space of the gallery, it seems as if the story is mainly told through the large mural panels (see Figure 20 and Figure 21) and a few artifacts displayed. Upon closer inspection it is clear that the primary sources and accounts for this difficult history in East Tennessee are being interpreted, but the information is not front and center, making it easy to miss. This specific section on forced removal and the Trail of Tears at the Museum of East Tennessee History provides some historical context for visitors in the interpretive books that are around waist level and are located throughout the galleries.

“The ‘Removal’ Treaty” outlines two different perspectives on the Treaty of New Echota (1835). William M. Davis, a Cherokee Nation property appraiser, argued that the Treaty of New Echota was not a treaty “because [it is] not sanctioned by the great body of the Cherokees and made without their participation or assent.” Underneath Davis’s assertions, are the sentiments of President Andrew Jackson. Jackson outlined that he viewed treaties with Indigenous tribes as unnecessary as tribes were not sovereign and were therefore subjects of the United States government and as such, must abide with federal legislation. The information presented in the perspectives of David and Jackson, could potentially allow for discussion and further analysis among visitors. The historical context and documents are present at the Museum of East Tennessee History, but the limited display prevents in depth inquiry among guests that could potentially lead to further understanding of the role of difficult history of Indigenous removal and the Trail of Tears in Tennessee.

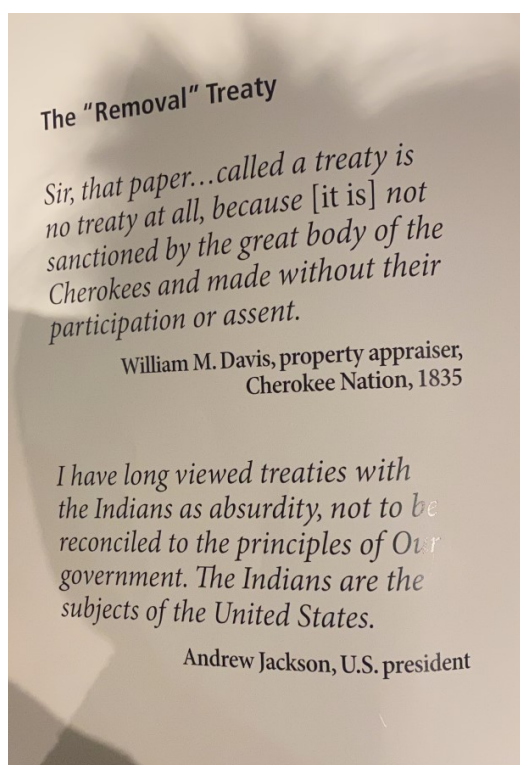


Figure 22. “The ‘Removal’ Treaty” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

The pages within this specific interpretive book continue to paint a picture of the loss and suffering surrounding the difficult history of the Trail of Tears, as the lived experiences of members of the Cherokee Nation are shared. George Hicks, of Mouse Creek, addressed the removal through a mournful farewell, “Now we are about the take out final leave and kind farewell to our native land and country that the Great Sprit gave our Fathers...” Hicks’s account mirrored the sentiment of the Cherokee people as they were forcibly removed west to Indian territory. In addition to the “Final Farewell” of Hicks, attempts by well-known historical Cherokee leader, John Ross, are also highlighted. An excerpt (see figure 24) from Ross’s letter “To the Senate” (1836), emphasized the dedication of the Cherokee people who had fought alongside American people in many conflicts and wars.

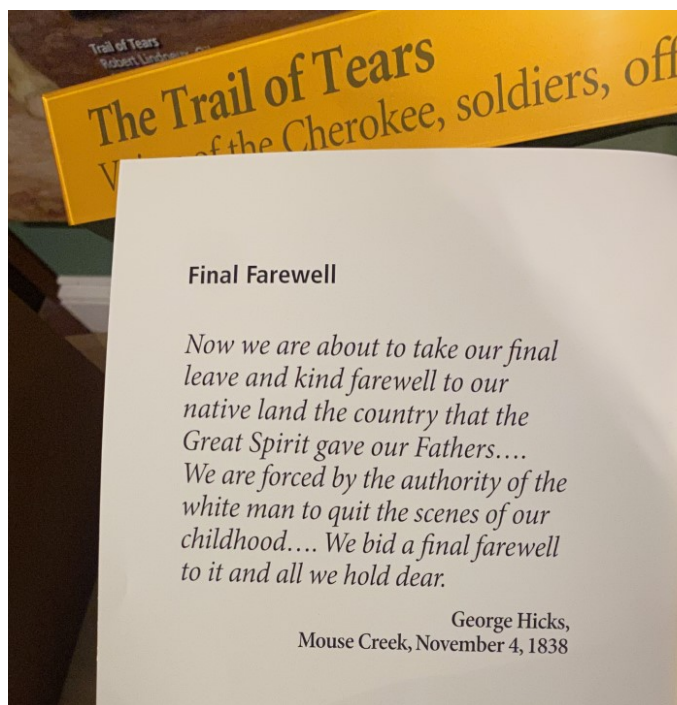


Figure 23. “Final Farewell” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

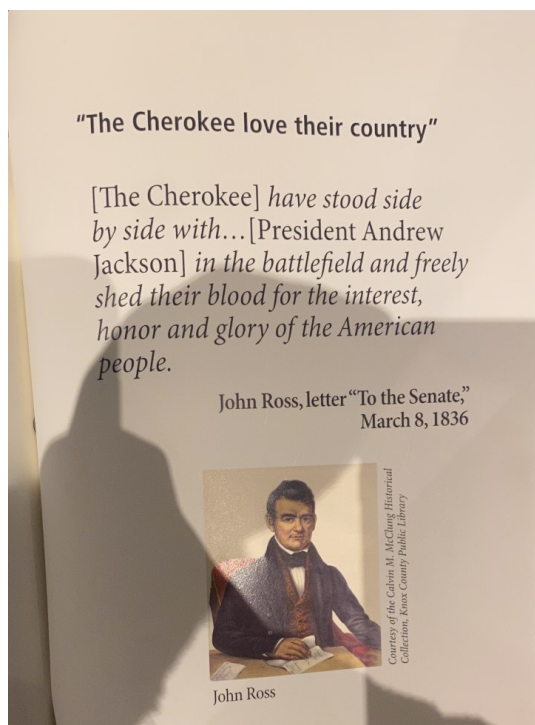
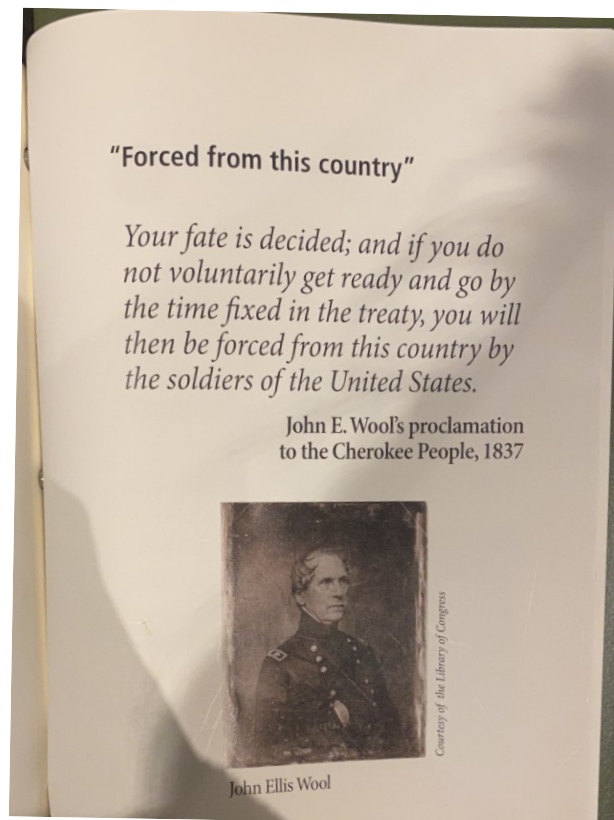


Figure 24. “The Cherokee love their country” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

This section of “Voices” that interprets the Trail of Tears also includes accounts from those of the Cherokee Nation and accounts from soldiers, missionaries, and others acting on

behalf of the federal government to ensure the removal happened according to plans. The proclamation below (see Figure 25) from John E. Wood, issued in 1837, provides an example of the orders issued from United States military perspective. In addition to Wood's proclamation, General Winfield Scott's words are also featured, as he approached the task of forcibly removing the Cherokee Nation to Indian Territory.



*Figure 25. "Forced from this country" interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

The difficult history of holding camps where many Cherokee people were held prisoner is briefly addressed, but further detail beyond the information of Reverend Evan Jones 1838 account and the information in the “Trail of Tears” interpretive pages are not displayed. The difficult history regarding imprisonment of Cherokee people at internment camps across the southeastern region, is largely ignored beyond a few nods in the interpretive texts displayed. While Reverend Jones’s account addressed the interment camps in Georgia, there are also examples and primary sources to use to further outline and analyze the existence of similar pre-removal holding sites in East Tennessee.

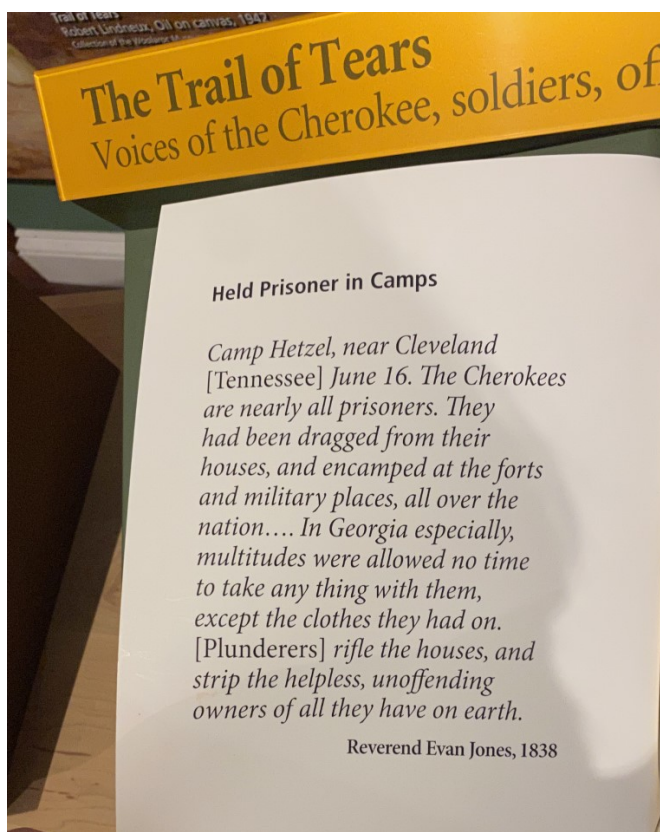


Figure 26. “Held Prisoner in Camps” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

Ben Harris McClary detailed the process of round-ups for internment and leading to eventual removal, and the continuous conflicts regarding removal between Cherokee representatives such as John Ross and United States generals such as Winfield Scott:

After two years of pleas and threats from various United States agencies, the roundup of the Cherokees began in May 1838 with seven thousand soldiers under the command of General Winfield Scott. The Cherokees were taken—young and old, poor and rich, along with their black slaves—with whatever possessions they could quickly gather before whites rushed in to claim their lottery winnings or to plunder what the unfortunate prisoners had been unable to take. The captives were taken to collection camps where most of them languished all summer while Indian representatives, most notably John Ross, and General Scott struggled with procedures for effecting their deportation.<sup>95</sup>

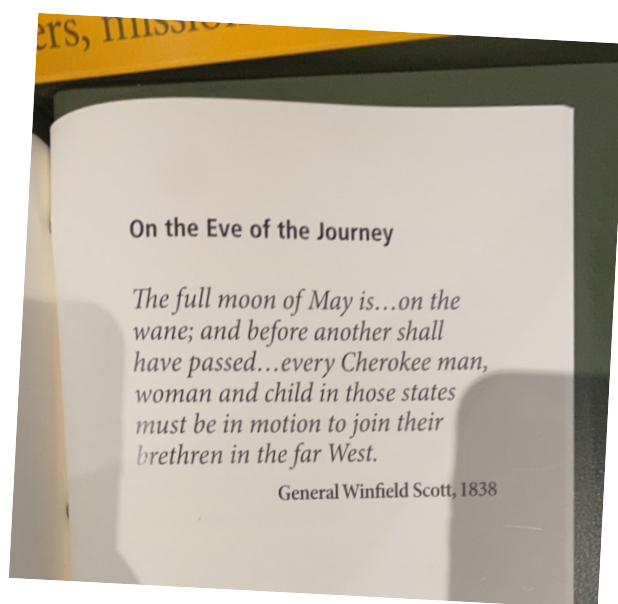
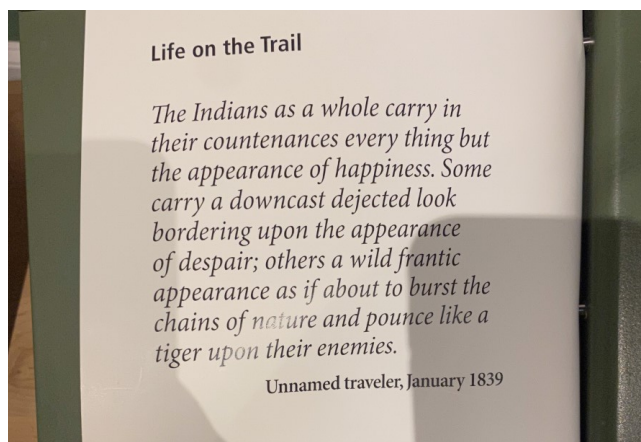


Figure 27. “On the Eve of the Journey” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

The interpretive text next provides detailed accounts from life on the trail and throughout the process of removal. One unnamed traveler wrote in January 1839 “The

<sup>95</sup> Ben Harris McClary, “Trail of Tears, or Nunna-da-ul-tsun-yi,” Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/trail-of-tears-or-nunna-da-ul-tsun-yi/>.

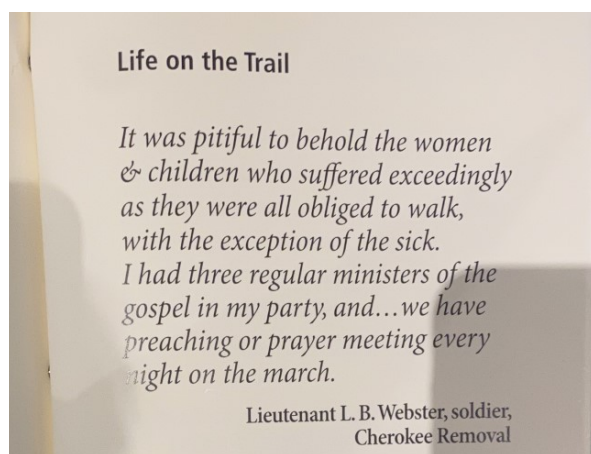
Indians as a whole carry in their counting every thing but the appearance of happiness. Some carry a downcast dejected look bordering upon the appearances of despair; others a wild frantic appearance as if about to burst the chains of nature and pounce like a tiger upon their enemies.”



*Figure 28. “Life on the Trail” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

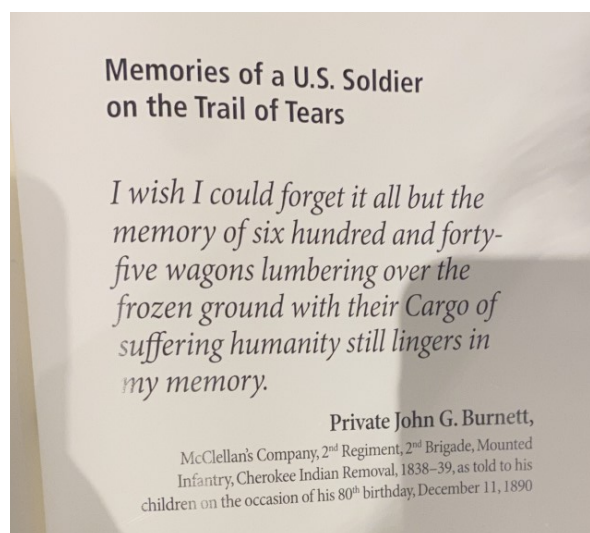
The information detailed in “Life on the Trail” is shared without further context. While the traveler is unnamed, the date is listed as January 1839. To add to the historical context and encourage visitors to engage in and practice historical empathy, ETHS could share the weather reports and patterns available for the southeastern and midwestern United States in January of 1839 to further highlight the treacherous conditions of which many Cherokee people traveled along what would become known as the Trail of Tears.

Additional account titled “Life on the Trail” by Lieutenant L.B. Webster, further emphasized the conditions on the Trail of Tears and wrote that most were “obliged to walk.” Webster continued that there were nightly prayer meetings as Cherokee tribal members traveled the Trail of Tears.



*Figure 29. “Life on the Trail” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

Another account remembered by Private John G. Burnett years after the forced removal had happened, addressed the horrors of the trek, and upon recalling the atrocities wished to forget the “suffering humanity” as it lingered and haunted his memory decades later.



*Figure 30. “Memories of a U.S. Soldier on the Trail of Tears” interpretive text at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

Interpretation of the institution of enslavement at the Museum of East Tennessee History can mainly be found in the second section of “Voices of the Land.” In this section, visitors are encouraged to engage with interpretive text panels and interactive panels. While the museum does acknowledge the existence of enslavement in Knoxville and East Tennessee through interpretive texts, a few interactive panels, and by displaying artifacts excavated from Blount Mansion that belonged to the enslaved individuals, much of early enslavement in the region is not analyzed. The research from Lisa Oakley’s thesis about the enslaved individuals at Blount Mansion, the research accompanying the dig and analyses by Dr. Faulkner, as well as other census and primary source data are available to address the influences and lives of enslaved people and free African Americans in East Tennessee pre-statehood.

There are many artifacts in this section of the museum, and visitors could potentially benefit from having less to look at, but more context through interactive or hands-on interpretation, rather than through simply reading, looking, and passing through the exhibit space. The interpretation possibilities in this large space are great, and there are many potential opportunities and stories to engage with visitors about difficult history in East Tennessee to provide more historical context and lead to a better understanding of the content.

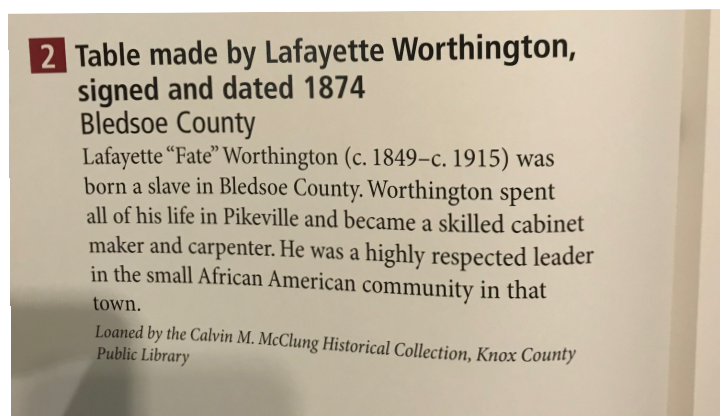
In this space, interpreting enslavement in early Tennessee statehood, while further establishing the interconnectedness of enslavement to the earliest part of “Voices” is a must for accurate interpretation of the difficult history. The difficult history of the institution of

enslavement is deeply connected and intertwined with early statehood of Tennessee, including white settler history and history of the Cherokee nation, and the Appalachian region. In order to tell the full, inclusive story, proper historical context has to be established for visitors through in-depth, but accessible interpretation.

Opportunities to advance interpretation already exist in the current interpretation and exhibitions. For example, the desk pictured below in Figure 31, made by a formerly enslaved man from Bledsoe County named Lafayette Worthington is displayed in this section of “Voices.” While the interpretive text in the book (see Figure 32) provides limited context, visitors would have to look to find the information about the desk or the craftsman who made it. In updating exhibitions to include easily accessible and detailed interpretive texts, visitors of “Voices” would benefit from understanding more about artifacts like this desk, made by Mr. Worthington, and potentially learn about the impact of enslaved and free Black craftspeople in Appalachia during the nineteenth century.



*Figure 31. “Table made by Lafayette Worthington, signed and dated 1874,” on display at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photographs taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*



*Figure 32. "Table made by Lafayette Worthington, signed and dated 1874," interpretative text for Figure 31 on display at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photographs taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*

In addition to interpreting difficult history like enslavement and abolition, in this section of "Voices," visitors will find Civil War memorabilia and interpretation for both the Union and Confederate armies, alluding to Tennessee divided loyalties. Battle flags and military uniforms are displayed, and stories of those who fought on both sides of the battle lines are interpreted. The interpretation of artifacts and information are shared through exhibition panels and interactive features, but much like the Trail of Tears section, important historical context are in the interpretive books throughout the gallery. As previously mentioned, allowing for specific and detailed interpretation, and utilizing the pull-out drawers for hand-on interpretation would help make the information more accessible for visitors. The exhibition space pictured in Figure 33 includes a flag awarded to Susan Brownlow Boynton for resisting Confederate armies, and also present views for and against secession in Tennessee during the Civil War.



*Figure 33. “The Great Divide” and associated artifacts and interpretation at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*

As previously addressed, East Tennessee was a hotbed of contention on the eve of the Civil War, and the material culture objects and interpretive texts displayed within this section of “Voices” not only presents arguments for and against secession, but also suggests visitors to choose a side to support. While the hands-on interpretation for that interactive panel has not been widely used since the outbreak of Covid19 beginning in 2020, the text is still readable by visitors. If the museum plans to accurately and inclusively interpret all history, including difficult history, changing the text to reflect updated language and best practices would better represent the East Tennessee Historical Society’s efforts to accurately and inclusive interpret historical events and perspectives.

The East Tennessee Historical Society’s Museum of East Tennessee History displays informational text and artifacts for both Confederate and Union soldiers who fought during the Civil War. The context is available for most artifacts, but it is hard to access if you are unsure where to look. Including larger numbers for associated artifacts and text interpretation

would help ease the mental load of visitors, and allow many to engage more freely with the information presented.

For example, I learned during my residency that the panel pictured in Figure 34 often caused issues for visitors regarding the location of where the photograph was taken. If you are looking at Figure 34 in “Voices,” the caption, location, and date are hard to locate upon a casual glance. If one looks closely, the information is available underneath the exhibition cases, at the bottom left of the panel. Interpretative panels and descriptors are essential for museum-goers to establish historical context. While there is a lot of information on the events leading up to the Civil War and actual battles during the Civil War, the interpretation for the institution of enslavement and abolition, are not as comprehensive as they potentially could be. The museum does have information on what abolition is, and various abolition efforts, as well as the stories of a few significant enslaved and self-emancipated individuals from the region. Like the information in the Trail of Tears section of “Voices,” the information is available, but some parts can be hard to locate in the exhibit and interpretative texts.



*Figure 34. “The Nation at War in East Tennessee” exhibition panel at the Museum of East Tennessee History. Photograph taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*

While the exhibits in “Voices of the Land” are permanent, the exhibitions of the Rogers-Claussen Feature Gallery rotate annually. In addition to creating and implementing groundbreaking educational and community programs, the curatorial team for the East Tennessee Historical Society continues to not shy away from interpreting and exhibiting difficult history. The “Black and White: Knoxville in the Jim Crow Era” (2019-2021) temporary exhibition by East Tennessee Historical Society Curator of Collections, Rebecca P’Simer, and Knox County Tennessee Pubic Library Assistant Director of Historical Services, Adam Alfrey, served as an example of deeply researched and accurate interpretation of the difficult history and legacy of the Jim Crow era in Knoxville.<sup>96</sup>

The exhibit was designed in a way to not shy away from racially charged events and topics, and was officially opened in 2020, amidst the unrest following the murder of George Floyd and the responses of the Black Lives Matter movement. The exhibit explored the influences of Black artists of Knoxville like Ruth Cobb Brice and brothers, Beauford and Joseph Delaney.

Brothers Beauford and Joseph Delaney were internationally known artists whose works are now part of some of the world's most prestigious collections. The Delaneys were born in Knoxville in the aftermath of slavery and the Civil War. Their education was often informal and sporadic, as they attended one rural school after another while traveling with their circuit-riding preacher father. They grew up amidst racial segregation, witnessed the upheaval of Knoxville’s race riot in 1919, and were aware of the lynching of blacks throughout the South. They were part of the Great Migration, during which thousands of African Americans left the South looking for opportunities. Beauford and Joseph took different paths, yet their paintings reflect the world they experienced, beginning with life in Knoxville. Ruth Cobb Brice was a

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<sup>96</sup> Hayley Choy, “City’s Black History events going online,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, January 31, 2021.

Knoxville-born educator, writer, and artist contemporary with Beauford and Joseph Delaney. Like the Delaneys, Brice grew up amidst racial segregation. But unlike them, Brice worked from Knoxville. Even without the direct influence of large art centers, Brice's paintings and poems gained national notoriety.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the highlighted importance of Beauford and Joseph Delaney and Ruth Cobb Brice, the exhibition introduced visitors to issues surrounding Black lives in Knoxville in the post-Reconstruction time period, and encouraged audience members to engage with the difficult history of Jim Crow. Interpretation included detailed legislation regarding voting rights and citizenship of Black Americans in Knoxville, an anonymously donated robe of Ku Klux Klan member, and other vivid examples of material culture and extremely detailed interpretive texts throughout that further detailed life in Knoxville during the Jim Crow era. This specific exhibit respectfully and accurately portrayed difficult history regarding segregation and racial injustices, and promoted learning and valuable and open dialogue among staff and board members, community members, and visitors.



Figure 35. Panel from the “Black & White” Exhibition at the Museum of East Tennessee History *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 10 Feb 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Black and White: Knoxville in the Jim Crow Era,” Exhibition Overview, East Tennessee Historical Society, 2020.



*Figure 36. Panel from the “Black & White” Exhibition at the Museum of East Tennessee History*  
*The Knoxville News-Sentinel, 10 Feb 2021.*

In 2021, the East Tennessee Historical Society received two grants to work towards master planning and content development. The first grant, from the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area awarded \$12,000 to fund the establishment of a scholar advisory team to work with the society as it assessed the “Voices of the Land” permanent exhibit content and plan for future revisions and evolution. This specific project with scholars began digitally in November 2021, and involved in-person project development meetings throughout the duration of 2022.

The second grant awarded to the East Tennessee Historical Society is from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for \$50,000. The IMLS grant allowed ETHS staff members to continue to partner with museum planners and website designers to create a more inclusive approach to history that will inform, underpin, and contribute to an updated website. Both of the grants awarded will be key as the ETHS works towards creating

a stronger virtual presence, curate and implement more inclusive narratives, and work to serve traditionally underserved audiences and communities of East Tennessee.

With grant funding secured and future grant funding in the works, I would suggest that the ETHS continue their current work with Cherokee scholars and Indigenous historians to ensure that exhibit content is up-to-date with the most recent language, scholarship, and resources available. In addition to working with the suggested groups and public historians above, I would suggest that the East Tennessee Historical Society continues to work closely with Dr. Carroll Van West and the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation as it continues to reframe and re-interpret the current museum exhibitions to reflect current best practices in the field of public history.

The section of “Voices of the Land” that focuses on Cherokee accomplishments, the creation of a written language by Sequoyah, and the forced migration of Cherokee bands along the Trail of Tears currently has a very large mural, pull-out drawers with interpretation, and books of interpretative texts. As funding allows, I would suggest working within this space of the gallery to create more object-based interpretation, and to work to utilize the drawer space, as well as the entire wall space to fully interpret events and history inclusively. The figures highlighted earlier in this chapter provide examples of opportunities for information already within in the gallery that could potentially offer in depth and inclusive interpretation of the difficult. History of Indigenous removal in East Tennessee. The interpretive books provide great information, but the information should be more front and

center to truly catch the eyes of visitors and result in maximum engagement with interpretation and exhibitions.

I would also suggest reworking exhibition and interpretive panels, as incoming grant funding and budget allocation allow, to reflect recent language shifts regarding the institution of enslavement by working with leading scholars of African American history. The East Tennessee Historical Society has previously collaborated with public historian and founder and co-creator of the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive, Dr. Tiffany Momon. Dr. Momon's expertise on African American history and material culture, as well as Black craftspeople of Tennessee and surrounding states, would help update current interpretations and inform future inclusive interpretation. Emphasizing the work and impact of African American craftspeople in East Tennessee, would allow for the ETHS to approach interpretation in a more object-focused way, rather than focusing on heavy text-based interpretation.

In a perfect world, the East Tennessee Historical Society would be awarded enough grant money and funding to create exhibitions and interpretive aspects of "Voices of the Land" through virtual platforms or screens to ensure that information and research can be updated periodically. This, however, is not the most affordable or doable option for most small-to medium-sized regional history museums, and, at this time, and implementation would put unnecessary pressure on ETHS employees and board members. Implementing technology within exhibitions is, often times, not where funding for small-to medium-sized institutions needs to be allocated. The East Tennessee Historical Society is an example of almost two centuries of resilience and progress within Appalachia, and it will always find a

way to do the community work and outreach, in trying to tell a more inclusive and accurate interpretation of all history, including difficult history.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INTERPRETING DIFFICULT HISTORY IN APPALACHIA

### THE GREENEVILLE-GREENE COUNTY HISTORY MUSEUM

The Greenville-Greene County History Museum, located in Greeneville, Tennessee, is a regional East Tennessee history museum that takes pride in being “one of only seven museums in America to complete the gold/top tier certification in all six areas of operation with the American Association of State and Local History.”<sup>98</sup> The Greenville-Greene County History Museum promotes and shares the history of Greene County Tennessee, and it serves as a site that interprets Appalachian and East Tennessee History through a local lens. The Greenville-Greene County History Museum, formerly known as the Nathanael Greene Museum until 2015, boasts “13 permanent galleries and over 12 walk-through exhibits [which] explore every facet of the region's history,” and provides an in-depth, regional exploration of East Tennessee history, life, and culture.<sup>99</sup>

When asked about the name change from the Nathanael Greene Museum to the Greenville-Greene County Living History Museum, Executive Director Betty Fletcher explained that it was a move towards inclusive and accurate representation of what is interpreted at the museum. Fletcher divulged that the Greenville-Greene County Living History Museum is not just interpreting and sharing the history of Nathanael Greene.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The Greenville-Greene County History Museum, <http://www.greenevillegreencountyhistorymuseum.com/>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Betty Fletcher, Interview, Conducted by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle, February 25, 2023.

While Greene and the Greene family are intricate parts of Greene County history, much more is interpreted and curated by the Greenville-Greene County History Museum.<sup>101</sup>



*Figure 37. Entrance of the Greenville-Greene County History Museum. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

The building that currently houses the Greenville-Greene County History Museum was built in 1916 and previously served as a high school, and the museum opened its doors to

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<sup>101</sup> Emily R. West, "Name Change on the Horizon for Nathanael Greene Museum," *The Greenville Sun*, February 10, 2015. [https://www.greenvillesun.com/news/local\\_news/name-change-on-horizon-for-nathanael-greene-museum/article\\_6c08c73f-893e-5474-a0da-3ce70b8c6204.html](https://www.greenvillesun.com/news/local_news/name-change-on-horizon-for-nathanael-greene-museum/article_6c08c73f-893e-5474-a0da-3ce70b8c6204.html).

the public officially in 1983. While the museum has been in its current building since 1983, plans are underway to create a much larger, updated building for the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum. According to an article in *The Greeneville Sun* in 2019, the museum's current layout makes it difficult for school groups to be closely monitored throughout their visits, and "the layout makes it hard to display exhibits and provide space to keep groups together and focused on the material presented."<sup>102</sup>

In addition to the suggested plans to meet interpretation needs, the new building will allow the museum accessibility features that are not available in the current building, making some of the building and exhibits non compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Another major concern is the proper preservation of artifacts. Climate and condition control within the Andrew Johnson Building where the museum is currently housed is a constant struggle, and artifacts are constantly at risk of being damaged. While the new building will come at a hefty price tag of somewhere between \$1.2 and \$1.5 million, officials estimated that the "cost to bring the current building up to code — without any other renovations — would be more than \$2 million."<sup>103</sup> The price for the new building may seem steep, but Dan Spice, co-president of the museum's board spoke to the importance of the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum and argued that "it's the community's museum, and we want everyone to feel that they're a part of it."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Cicely Babb, "Greeneville Greene County History Museum 'Here For Decades To Come' In New Facility," *The Greeneville Sun*, September 20, 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

According to Executive Director of Operations of the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, Betty Fletcher, the museum is governed by a working board of directors, and currently has about 16 board members serving. The museum is a recipient of many local grants each year and as well as a few federal grants. In 2020, the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum was nominated by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Medal for 2021. According to the report by the *Greenville Sun*, in addition to receding the IMLS nomination, the museum also “received notification that on behalf of the Tennessee Historical Records Advisory Board ... had been awarded a State Board Programming Grant in the amount of \$1,000.”<sup>105</sup>

This museum is the only small-to medium-sized regional history museum analyzed in this dissertation that does not charge admission, but it does encourage a suggested donation for visitors. In addition to grant funding and awards, admission donations, and revenue from other programs, the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum also holds annual fundraising events. In the previous five years, the museum has worked with a budget that ranges from \$52,519 in 2020, to \$74,840 in 2018. The total functioning expenses for the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum includes contributions to the museum, program services income, and money raised through fundraising efforts. Included in the total budgets reported are salaries for part-time employees at the museum. The salaries for the employees listed range greatly depending on revenue based on budgets. For example, according to the Greeneville-Greene County Museum’s 990 IRS Form for 2020, compensation for key

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<sup>105</sup> “Museum Receives Nomination And Grant,” *The Greenville Sun*, November 2, 2020. [https://www.greenvillesun.com/accent/museum-receives-nomination-and-grant/article\\_4e-ca0b28-264d-5d1a-a1fd-6263fb69fe27.html](https://www.greenvillesun.com/accent/museum-receives-nomination-and-grant/article_4e-ca0b28-264d-5d1a-a1fd-6263fb69fe27.html).

employees and officers were listed at \$0.00 as the museum recovered from a net income loss of -\$20,116 in 2019 and a reported net income of \$1,531 in 2020.<sup>106</sup>

In an interview with Director Fletcher, she explained that for the 2022-2023 Greeneville-Greene County History Museum budget, the museum is currently working within the budget range of \$0.00-\$79, 0000 annually, and has four paid part-time employees currently serving as staff. In addition to paid staff and working board members, the museum also has between three and five volunteers to help assist with public programs, school visits, and other outreach needs as necessary.<sup>107</sup> In addition to local grants and sources of revenue, Fletcher shared that the museum staff are actively applying to state and federal grant to supplement the total revenue and net income ranges reported for this fiscal year.<sup>108</sup>

While some only associate Greeneville as the hometown of the United States seventeenth president, Andrew Johnson, the town and Greene County history are so much more than that. The first European settlements in Greeneville date to the 1770s; its agricultural history counts the state's oldest farms. by settlers from Virginia and the Carolinas. The history is expansive and the interpretation efforts are daunting. Fletcher stressed that there are many significant local and regional people and events associated with Greene County interpreted at the museum, from the early history of abolitionism in

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<sup>106</sup> Internal Revenue Service, *Form 990: Greeneville Greene County History Museum INC The Museum*, 2019, Retrieved from *ProPublica*.; Also see, Internal Revenue Services, *Form 990: Greeneville Greene County Living History Museum INC The Museum*, 2020 Retrieved from *ProPublica*.

<sup>107</sup> Betty Fletcher, Interview, Conducted by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle, February 25, 2023.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*.

Tennessee to Civil War violence to the more modern industrialized history of the twentieth-century.

The story of enslavement in East Tennessee is focused at third floor exhibit, “Paths to Freedom.” This specific exhibit explores both the legacy of abolition in Greene County and the stories of enslavement in East Tennessee. It encourages patrons to analyze how the two concepts intermingled in many East Tennessee counties.



*Figure 38. "Paths to Freedom" exhibition at the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

One specific panel in “Paths to Freedom” examines the influences of abolitionists like Elihu Embree, publisher of the *Manumission Intelligencer* from Jonesborough, Tennessee, and his successor Benjamin Lundy’s sustained efforts to continue to spread the word of abolition in East Tennessee at his Greeneville headquarters, eventually forming “the fourth branch of the Tennessee Manumission Society” with other like-minded men in the area.

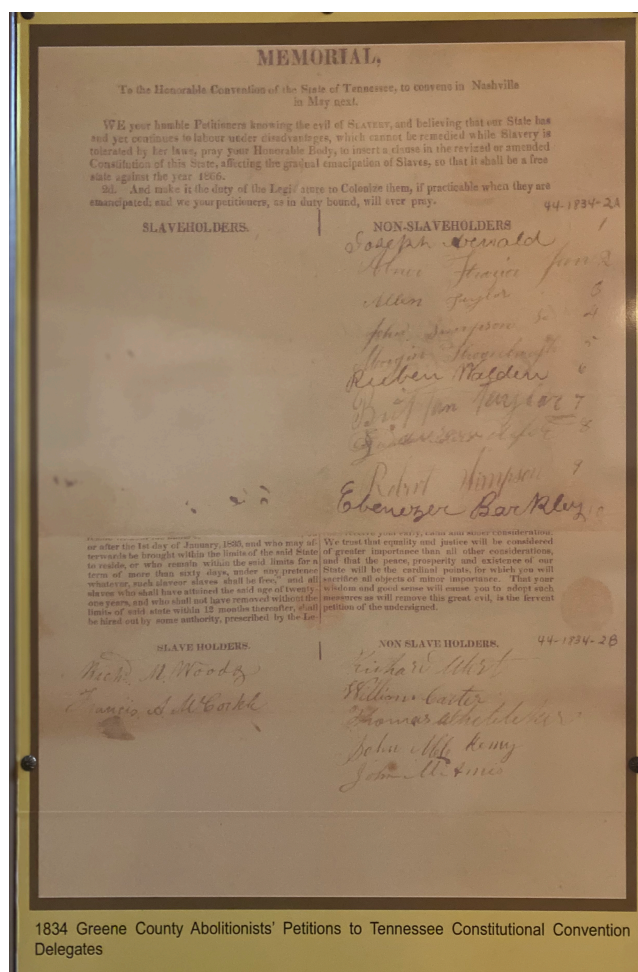


Figure 39. Names of abolitionists in Greene County exhibited at the Greenville-Greene County History Museum.. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

Featured on a side panel in this exhibit (see Figure 39) is a copy of a document issued by “hundreds of Greene County men [who] petitioned to the delegates of the 1834 Tennessee

Constitutional Convention requesting that they [delegates] include emancipation in the Tennessee Constitution,” further elaborating on East Tennessee’s complicated past rooted in both abolition and enslavement. As the enslaved populations in Tennessee census from 1860 reported, the enslaved presence in Greene County, Tennessee was relatively low, at a reported 6.9 percent, and the abolitionist efforts within the county and region were points of heightened tension and passion. Aligned with the content of sympathetic white East Tennesseans or abolitionists, similar panels in this section speak to the oral tradition of the existence of the Underground Railroad and conductors in Greene County providing aid and assistance to self-emancipated freedom seekers in the region. According to Asa Earl Martin, a group of men in neighboring Jefferson County formed a society and a constitution promoting the manumission of enslaved peoples:

The first evidence of a definite, organized anti-slavery effort in Tennessee appeared in December, 1814, 2 when eight citizens of Jefferson County met at the home of Elihu Swain for the purpose of forming an anti-slavery society. At this meeting a temporary organization was effected and a constitution was drawn up, which was to be submitted to a meeting called for that purpose in the Lost Creek Meeting House of Friends in Jefferson County, in February, 1815, when a permanent organization was to be made were to be elected.<sup>109</sup>

The Society adopted the following articles, the first two firmly grounded in abolitionist efforts, within their founding Constitution:

Article 1. Each member to have an advertisement in the most conspicuous part of the house in the following words, viz: 'Freedom is the natural right of all men; I therefore acknowledge myself a member of the Tennessee Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves.'

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<sup>109</sup> Asa Earl Martin, “The Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, December, I (December 1915): 262-263.

Article 2. That no member vote for Governor, or any legislator, unless we believe him to be in favor of emancipation.

Article 3. That we convene twelve times a year at the Lost Creek Meeting House; the first on the eleventh of the third month next, which meeting shall proceed to appoint a president, clerk and treasurer, who shall continue in office for twelve months.

Article 4. The requisite qualification of our members are true Republican principles, patriotic and in favor of emancipation, and that no immoral character be admitted into the society as a member."

Each member is to have an advertisement in the most conspicuous part of his house, in the following words, viz.: " Freedom is the natural right of all men, I therefore acknowledge myself a member of the Tennessee Society for promoting the manumission of slaves."<sup>110</sup>

The "Manumission Intelligencer" of the society was seemingly short-lived, as, it was replaced by *The Emancipator* in 1820. *The Emancipator* was the first published newspaper on the topic of abolition. In 1821, *The Emancipator* was purchased by Benjamin Lundy and the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. *The Emancipator* was printed in its entirety in 1932.<sup>111</sup>

While in the first half of the exhibition "Paths to Freedom" visitors encounter share stories of abolitionists, attempts for emancipation, and colonization efforts, the second half of the exhibition features the local story of seventeenth president of the United States, Greene County native, and controversial political figure, Andrew Johnson. Johnson served as running mate and vice president during Abraham Lincoln's second presidential term, and represents the controversy and contradictions surrounding the Civil War and Reconstruction-eras.

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<sup>110</sup> Asa Earl Martin, "The Anti-Slavery Societies of Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, December, 1915, Vol. 1, No. 4 (December, 1915), 263. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/42637323.pdf>.

<sup>111</sup> Tara Mitchell Mielnik, "The Emancipator," Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/the-emancipator/>.

Johnson, an enslaver, often proves to be a character in American history that evokes curiosity. The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum uses the next space of “Paths to Freedom” to present Andrew Johnson and his white family members, while also introducing what the museum highlights as “The Other Johnson Family.”



Figure 40. “Johnson Slaves: The Other Johnson Family.” Photograph taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.

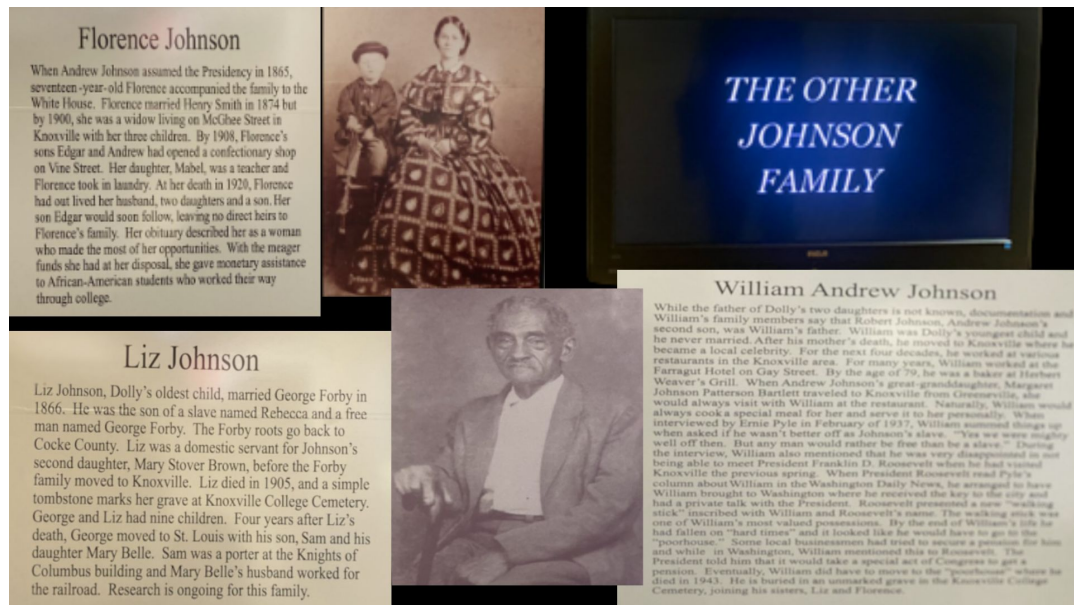


Figure 41. “The Other Johnson Family.” Photographs taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

While some of Johnson’s past as an enslaver is told through the paneling in this section of “Paths to Freedom,” some of the information seems to be glossed over. One panel displays the following text about the enslaved woman Dolly Johnson, purchased by Andrew Johnson at age fourteen: “Thinking that he looked like a kind man, she [Dolly] approached Andrew at a slave sale in 1842 and asked him to buy her. A few days later, Johnson returned to buy Dolly’s twelve-year-old half-brother, Sam.”<sup>112</sup>

In this section of the museum’s interpretation, much is implied about the parentage of the children of Dolly and the connections to Andrew Johnson (often speculated to have fathered Dolly’s first two children) and his son Robert Johnson (known father of Dolly’s third child) to the enslaved children of Dolly.

<sup>112</sup> The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, “Paths to Freedom,” Exhibition Panel, Image taken July 2022 and used with permission of the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum.



*Figure 42. Dolly Johnson and Andrew Johnson Stover. National Park Service.*

According to the “The Formerly Enslaved Households of President Andrew Johnson” by White House Historical Association historian Sarah Fling, “some historians have speculated that Johnson’s ‘fatherly’ treatment of Dolly’s children, coupled with slave schedule data indicating that her children were ‘mulatto,’ though she was listed as ‘black,’ point to the possibility that Andrew Johnson himself may have been the father of Liz and Florence.”<sup>113</sup> In addition to the speculation surrounding the parentage of enslaved women Liz and Florence Johnson, Dolly’s youngest son, William Johnson’s death certificate (see Figure 42), that was completed by a relative, openly listed William’s father as Robert Johnson, son of Andrew Johnson. Fling addressed the commonality of enslavers entering

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<sup>113</sup> Sarah Fling, “The Formerly Enslaved Households of President Andrew Johnson,” The White House Historical Society, 2020.

“into sexual relationships with their enslaved servants, the bulk of which were non-consensual,” and continued that “while there is no DNA evidence of these relationships in the Johnson household, Johnson’s fatherly treatment of Dolly’s children, their recorded racial complexion, and William’s death certificate all illuminate the complex and often predatory nature of male slave ownership.”<sup>114</sup>

4813		CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		10019	
DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH		STATE OF TENNESSEE		DIV. OF VITAL STATISTICS	
COOPERATING WITH DEPT. OF COMMERCE		BUREAU OF THE CENSUS		REG. NO. 44873	
NO. 4885		X		REG. DIST. 487	
1. FULL NAME <i>William G. Johnson</i>			2. DATE OF DEATH <i>5-16 1943</i>		
3. PLACE OF DEATH: A) COUNTY <i>Scott</i> CIVIL DISTRICT <i>13</i>			4. LEGAL RESIDENCE: A) STATE <i>Tenn.</i>		
B) CITY OR TOWN <i>Maloneville</i>			B) COUNTY <i>Knox</i> DISTRICT <i>13</i>		
C) NAME OF HOSPITAL <i>Blue Maloney Home</i>			C) CITY OR TOWN <i>See Maloneville, Tenn.</i>		
D) LENGTH OF STAY: IN HOSPITAL _____ IN COMMUNITY _____			D) STREET NO. <i>Rural Route # 12</i>		
E) CITIZEN OF FOREIGN COUNTRY _____ (YES OR NO)			E) CITIZEN OF FOREIGN COUNTRY <i>720</i> (YES OR NO)		
5. RACE OF DECEASED <i>W</i> SEX <i>M</i> SINGLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCED <input type="checkbox"/> WIDOWED <input type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			MEDICAL CERTIFICATION		
6. AGE <i>86</i> YEARS MONTHS <i>9</i> DAYS <i>8</i> IF LESS THAN ONE DAY			20. I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I ATTENDED THE DECEASED FROM _____ 19____ TO _____ 19____		
7. DATE OF BIRTH: MONTH <i>2</i> DAY <i>9</i> YEAR <i>1858</i>			AND THAT I LAST SAW HIM ALIVE ON _____ 19____		
8. PLACE OF BIRTH: CITY OR COUNTY <i>Greenville</i> STATE OR COUNTRY <i>Tenn.</i>			AND THAT DEATH OCCURRED ON THE DATE STATED AT _____ M.		
9. HUSBAND OR WIFE OF _____			IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH: <i>Cardiac Arrest</i> DURATION <i>131A</i>		
10. IF VETERAN: NAME OF VETERAN <i>None</i> SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER <i>None</i>			DUE TO: _____		
11. USUAL OCCUPATION <i>Carpenter</i>			OTHER CONDITIONS (INCLUDE PREGNANCY WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF DEATH): _____		
12. INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS <i>None</i>			PHYSICIAN UNDERLINE CAUSE TO WHICH DEATH SHOULD BE CHARGED STATISTICALLY		
13. FULL NAME <i>Robert Johnson</i>			OPERATION FINDINGS _____		
14. BIRTHPLACE <i>Greenville, Tenn.</i>			AUTOPSY? FINDINGS _____		
15. MAIDEN NAME <i>Dolly Johnson</i>			21. IF DEATH WAS DUE TO EXTERNAL CAUSES, FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:		
16. BIRTHPLACE <i>Greenville, Tenn.</i>			A) ACCIDENT, SUICIDE OR HOMICIDE (SPECIFY) _____		
17. INFORMANT <i>Miss William Boyd</i> ADDRESS <i>76 Darden St., Knoxville, Tenn.</i>			B) DATE OF OCCURRENCE _____		
18. BURIAL: PERSONAL BY <i>None</i> DATE <i>5/18 1943</i>			C) WHERE DID INJURY OCCUR _____ CITY COUNTY STATE _____		
19. UNDERTAKER <i>W. H. Babb &amp; Son</i> ADDRESS <i>Marietta, Tenn.</i>			D) DID INJURY OCCUR IN OR ABOUT HOME, ON FARM, IN INDUSTRIAL PLACE, IN PUBLIC PLACE _____		
DATE FILED <i>6-1 1943</i>			WHILE AT WORK _____ MEANS OF INJURY _____		
SIGNATURE <i>W. H. Babb</i> H.D. _____			SIGNATURE _____ H.D. _____		
ADDRESS <i>None</i>			ADDRESS _____ DATE SIGNED _____		

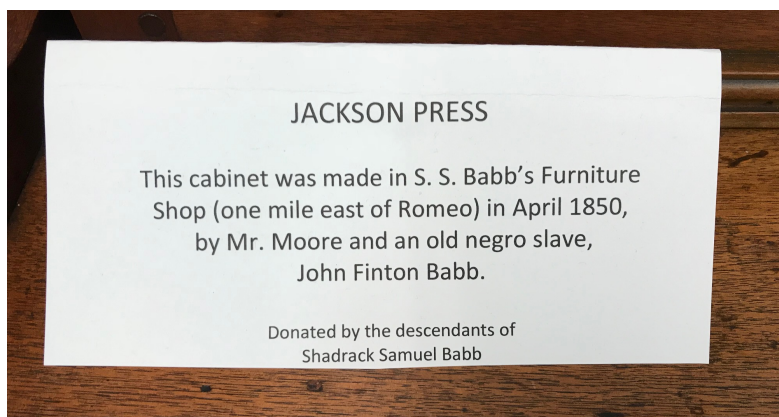
Figure 43. Certificate of Death, William Johnson, 1943. Ancestry.com.

During a visit, Director Fletcher shared with me material culture objects ranging from pottery to furniture displayed throughout the museum. The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum displays various examples of craftsmanship by enslaved individuals who lived in Greene County. A solid oak cabinet, made in S.S. Babb’s Furniture Shop is displayed

<sup>114</sup> Sarah Fling, “The Formerly Enslaved Households of President Andrew Johnson” the White House Historical Society, 2020.

in one of the galleries on the first floor of the museum. The interpretation panel for this artifact currently focuses heavily on where the artifact was made, but does mention the name of the enslaved man who crafted the cabinet, John Fenton Babb, and the year it was made, 1850.

While the interpretive text does give a brief overview of details, the craftsmanship of John Babb, this artifact provides a fantastic opportunity for the Greenville Greene County History Museum to highlight enslaved craftspeople within Greene County. In addition to providing an overview of enslaved and Black craftspeople of the region, I would also suggest a rewrite of the interpretative label/text to represent language shifts happening in twenty-first century museums globally, regarding enslaved individuals and African Americans. By addressing the skilled labor, as well exploited labor through the institution of enslavement, openly and accurately in updated interpretation, the Greenville-Greene County History Museum would serve as a shining example of institutional accountability among small-to medium-sized institutions working towards inclusive discussion of difficult history within Appalachia in the twenty-first century.



*Figure 44. Interpretive text for Jackson Press, 1860. Photograph taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*



*Figure 45. Jackson Press, 1860. Photograph taken by Dr. Carroll Van West.*

The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum directs a lot of attention in interpretation towards post-emancipation life for African Americans living in Greene County in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Post-emancipation African American communities in Greene County focused heavily on religion, education, and family, and research proves that “religious and educational institutions had shared founding members and physical spaces from the very beginning. This same pattern of cooperation and coexistence in

religious practice and education extended to freedmen and women in the city following the Civil War.”<sup>115</sup>

According to the “Free People of Color, Greene County, Tennessee: 1860” from Black in Appalachia, there were many sizable free Black communities throughout Greene County before the onset of the Civil War.<sup>116</sup> The numbers of free Black communities within Greene County is not surprising when the history of the county’s abolitionist efforts and Unionist leanings are addressed. Many of these family units, in addition to the formerly enslaved individuals, continued to stay in Greene County post-emancipation, which resulted in cultural, social, political, and economic intersectionality of life for Communities of Color and white communities in Greene County.

“Places, Perspectives: African American Community-building in Tennessee, 1860-1920,” is a website that features African American place-making in several Tennessee counties, including Greene County. Places, Perspectives “is a collaborative partnership initiative funded through a matching grant from the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area to Middle Tennessee State University’s Department of Geosciences and James E. Walker Library in partnership with the Center for Historic Preservation.”<sup>117</sup> According to Places, Perspectives, “four prominent African American churches: Presbyterian, Methodist,

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<sup>115</sup> “Greene County,” *Places, Perspectives: African American Community-building in Tennessee*, MTSU Walker Library, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/8f0f04dba2ba4072a3d4cb2871c84afe>.

<sup>116</sup> “FREE PEOPLE OF COLOR, GREENE COUNTY, TENNESSEE: 1860,” Black in Appalachia, Kathleen Kelley, Contributor, 1860. <https://blackinappalachia.omeka.net/items/show/848>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

Baptist, and AME Zion are located on or near properties purchased in 1886 for Pleasant Hill/Wesley Cemetery [in Greene County] and for a ‘colored’ school or college (now the site of George Clem High School.”<sup>118</sup> In addition to churches and religious institutions, adjacent African American cemeteries often help fill in blanks where silences loom regarding Black history in Greene County.

While the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum does display specific stories and connections to the stories of enslavement, Civil War, sectionalism, and abolition efforts, the museum seems does not go into great detail about the Indigenous story and the story of Indigenous removal in East Tennessee. The exhibition titled, “The Tennessee Country: Paleo to Pioneer,” spans a very large frame of time and features a few panels and small displays of early Indigenous life in East Tennessee, but much of the story of the Cherokee impact on regional history and the impact and consequences of removal is left untold.

Director of Operations of the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, Fletcher, admitted that while the museum had never really done much interpretation of Cherokee Removal, they are always developing grant proposals and funding to allow for better, inclusive interpretation, and have hopes of creating traveling trunks for educational outreach purposes that will focus heavily on the “Paleo to Pioneer” era of interpretation in the very near future. Fletcher hopes that in creating hands-on interpretation for educational and outreach programming at the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, the rich time

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<sup>118</sup> “FREE PEOPLE OF COLOR, GREENE COUNTY, TENNESSEE: 1860,” Black in Appalachia, Kathleen Kelley, Contributor, 1860. <https://blackinappalachia.omeka.net/items/show/848>.

period of Indigenous and white settler interactions will broaden interpretation and allow for even more in-depth learning for young museum-goers.<sup>119</sup>

The panels and exhibitions in the “Paleo to Pioneer” section expand briefly on the story of early Indigenous life in the region, but not to the extent that the East Tennessee Historical Society or the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum discuss Indigenous life and the difficult history surrounding removal. The museum does not address removal to the same extent as the other case studies analyzed in this dissertation because the Trail of Tears routes did not move through this section of Tennessee in the same capacities as it did the other regions of Tennessee.

The main focus in this section of the gallery is early Indigenous life before contact with white settlers, and early interactions and cultural exchanges on the frontier. As one enters the space they are greeted with and early history of Indigenous tribes in what would become the state of Tennessee.

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<sup>119</sup> Betty Fletcher, Interview, Conducted by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle, February 25, 2023

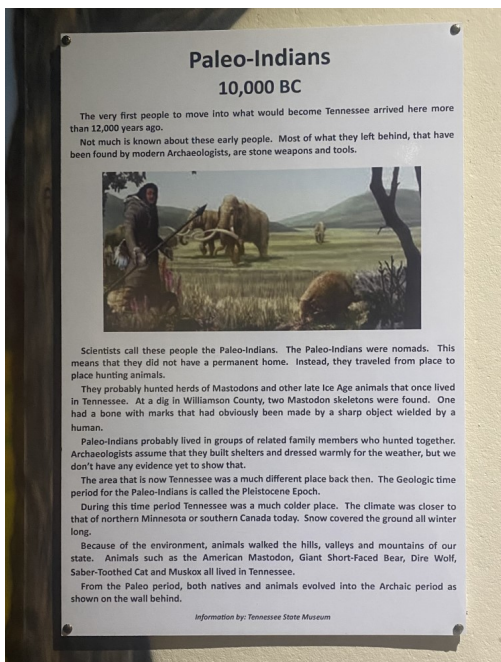


Figure 46. "Paleo-Indians, 10,000 BC." Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

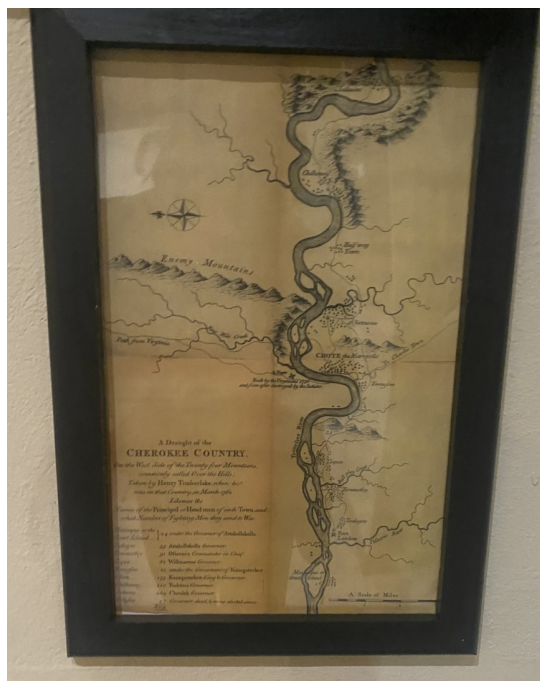
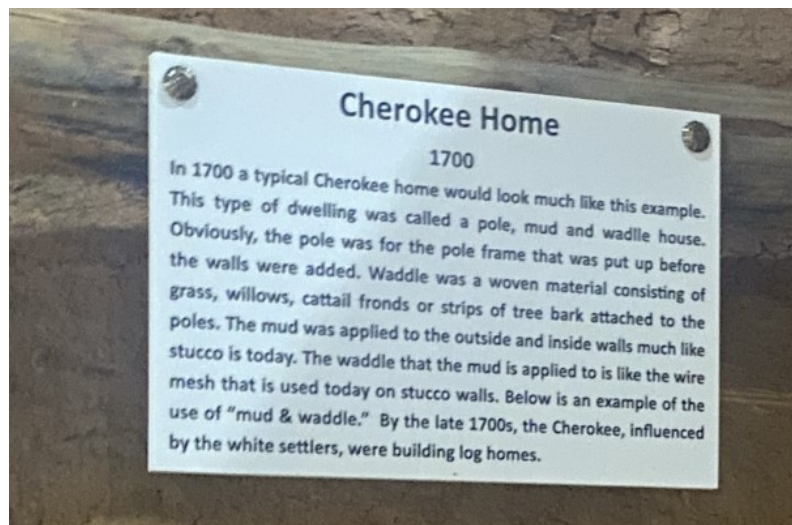


Figure 47. "A Drought of the Cherokee Country." Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

As visitors to continue to weave through the narrative of the Indigenous presence in Greene County, Tennessee, they are introduced to a model of a Cherokee home from the early 1700s (see Figure 48). This display includes an interpretive text description (see Figure 49) of the materials used when building homes, and concludes that many Cherokee switched to building log homes, influenced by the white settlers in the region. The space also displays furs and other tools that would have potentially been used by the Cherokee.



*Figure 48. and Figure 49. "Cherokee Home." Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*



While the story of early Cherokee life is somewhat analyzed, the information is brief, and much like the interpretation of the East Tennessee Historical Society's early Indigenous interpretation, tells the stories of Indigenous life through the lens of white settlement. One panel (see Figure 50) points to the long history of the Cherokee in East Tennessee before white settlement, and unpacks the European roots for the name Cherokee. The panel also briefly outlines contributions of few Cherokee Principal People.

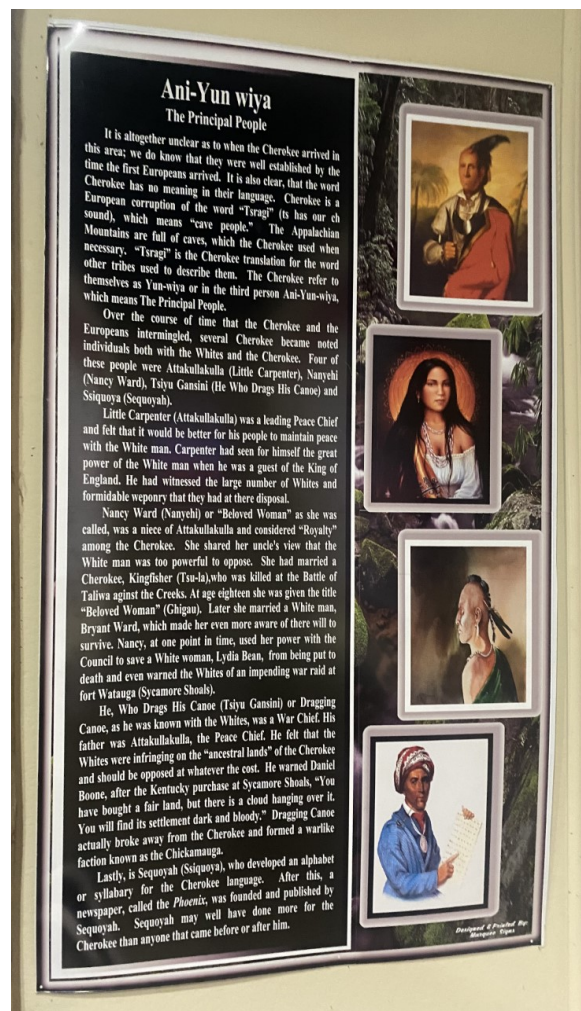


Figure 50. "Ani-Yun wiya." Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum is a small, locally focused museum with a staff who welcome and engage with visitors daily. Like many small-to medium-sized history institutions, this museum has done a lot without funding efforts awarded to and allocated for bigger state and regional institutions. In an interview with Fletcher she explicitly expressed concerns regarding the reproduction or printing of new exhibition materials. Many times, Fletcher explained, board members take on the cost of printing exhibition or informative panels for the museum.<sup>120</sup> Producing, printing, and executing major exhibits is a massive task that requires ongoing funding and manpower, and like many small-to medium-sized institutions, this museum has worked well with their current conditions and what they can offer to the public.

The incorporation of exhibition panels from the Tennessee State Museum in the “The Tennessee Country: Paleo to Pioneer,” (see Figure 46) proves that there is potential for institutional collaboration within exhibition panels and resources. I would suggest working with other regional and state history museums to continue to update the research displayed, add to the voices interpreted, and tell a more inclusive story of East Tennessee and Greene County throughout history. In order for museums, especially small-to medium-sized institutions to remain relevant to visitors and generate revenue, institutions need to create cohesive narrative that incorporates stories and voices featured across the state. When speaking with Director Fletcher about potential expansion of the use of traveling or temporary exhibition materials, she emphasized that the museum would like to have access to

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<sup>120</sup> Betty Fletcher, Interview, Conducted by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle, February 25, 2023

the resources, but often times the constraints surrounding insurance to cover traveling exhibitions and other associated costs often keep the small-to medium-sized museums and institutions from being able to fully access the resources in its entirety.

The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum works directly with school groups, homeschool groups, and adult groups, and providing traveling trunks for community and school outreach, according to Fletcher, is the next step for hand-on learning. The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum staff, volunteers, board members, and community members are all dedicated to doing the work, funding the institution, and ensuring the legacy lives on to educate the next generation of Greene County heritage, difficult history included. As museum staff in Greene County continue to apply for local, state, and federal grants, emphasizing the communities represented, constituents served, and content interpreted is of the utmost importance to ensure that the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum can continue to do the work needed to move towards responsible and inclusive interpretation of difficult history in the twenty-first century.

## The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum

McMinn County is located in southeastern Tennessee. Goodspeed's Publishing's

*History of the Thirty East Tennessee Counties* (1887) detailed that:

McMinn County lies in lower East Tennessee between the counties of Monroe and Meigs. It embraces an area of 480 square miles and it is doubtful if any county in the State possesses resources of greater variety. Along the base of the Chilhowee Mountains, are found inexhaustible veins of brown hematite ore, yielding forty-eight per cent metallic iron, and beds of marble of the finest quality. Gold, silver, and lead are found in paying quantities. The surface of the county consists of a series of low parallel ridges separated by swift flowing streams, which furnish excellent waterpower. The principal creeks are Conasauga, Chestua, Cane, Estanelle, Mouse, Spring, and Rogers, all of which traverse the county from northeast to southwest and empty into the Hiwassee River.<sup>121</sup>

According to the McMinn County Historical Society, the history of the established town by white settlers dates back to the early 1800s, and as interpretation at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum explains, the county was created from Indian territory.

McMinn County, located in southeast Tennessee, was established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1819. Named for Governor Joseph McMinn, the county was created from lands ceded by the Cherokees in the Hiwassee Purchase. Calhoun, the first town and county seat, was established in 1820 across the Hiwassee River from the Cherokee Indian Agency. The need for a more centrally located seat of government led to the county seat's removal in 1823 to Athens, fifteen miles north. Athens was chartered in 1822. By 1830 McMinn County had a population of over 14,000, including 1,250 slaves.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> History of the Thirty East Tennessee Counties, (Excerpt), Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing, 1887. [https://www.tngennet.org/mcminn\\_original/Goodspd1.html#:~:text=The%20act%20for%20the%20organization,Major%20John%20Walker%20at%20Calhoun](https://www.tngennet.org/mcminn_original/Goodspd1.html#:~:text=The%20act%20for%20the%20organization,Major%20John%20Walker%20at%20Calhoun).

<sup>122</sup> Bill Akins, "McMinn County," Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/mcminn-county/>

The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, founded in 1982 by Muriel Mayfield and Mintie Wilson, serves as another case study in this research delving into regional institutional responsibilities in East Tennessee and Appalachia. Both Mayfield and Wilson are listed as Honorary Trustees on the 2023 trustee overview. The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum 2023 board currently has six governing officers and thirteen trustees, including both county and city mayor representatives. According to institutional 990 IRS FORMS, in 2020, Executive Director, Ann S. Davis made \$34,087. According to the 990 documents for the McMinn County Living Heritage Society, beyond the compensation for the Executive Director, the working trustees are not financially compensated. The records also indicate that there are other paid positions for the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, in addition to the executive director. While the individual salaries of the three additional employees for the McMinn County Heritage Museum are not listed, the number is consistently reported as between \$70,000 and \$80,000.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Internal Revenue Service, *Form 990: McMinn County Living Heritage Museum Inc.*, 2019, Retrieved from *ProPublica.*; Also see, Internal Revenue Service, *Form 990: McMinn County Living Heritage Museum*, 2020, Retrieved from *ProPublica.*

**MCMINN COUNTY LIVING HERITAGE MUSEUM****2023 OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES****OFFICERS**

President - Susan Buttram  
Vice-President - Becky Simpson  
Secretary/Treasurer - Tom Biddle  
Executive Director - Ann S. Davis  
Past President - Ann Boyd  
Guild President - Terri Kratz

**TRUSTEES**

Emily Forrest  
Stanley Blair  
Greg Moses  
Janet Bruce  
Bob Roseberry  
Ashley Walker  
David Pierce  
Kathy Dougherty  
Justin Hicks

**CITY MAYOR REPRESENTATIVE**

Steve Sherlin

**COUNTY MAYOR REPRESENTATIVE**

Joe Guy

**HONORARY TRUSTEES**

Mintie Wilson  
Elaine Cathcart



*Figure 51. The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum is located in the McMinn County seat, of Athens, Tennessee. The Museum originally was housed at Tennessee Wesleyan University, and moved to its current location in 1989.<sup>124</sup> The current location, the former McMinn County High School, like the Andrew Johnson building that houses the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, is another effective example of adaptive reuse. Both school buildings were initially constructed as segregated white institutions, but were integrated in the 1960s.

The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum houses “more than 10,000 artifacts in 30 permanent exhibits that represent the culture and history of Southeast Tennessee from the

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<sup>124</sup> McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, “What We Do,” 2021. <https://www.livingheritagemuseum.org/what-we-do>.

1700's to the present.”<sup>125</sup> The mission of the McMinn County Living History Museum is “to steward the distinct history and heritage of McMinn County and the Southeast Region.”<sup>126</sup> This statement is similar to the mission statements of both the East Tennessee Historical Society and the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, further connecting the three institutions as public stewards of responsible and inclusive interpretation of East Tennessee and Appalachian history. The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum strives to meet its mission “by collecting, preserving, and interpreting artifacts, artwork, and other items representative of our community’s culture, both past and present,” to offer “education and enrichment for the public and visitors of all ages, races, and ethnicities.”<sup>127</sup>

Visitors of the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum are immediately greeted with an eye-catching wall detailing the history of McMinn County through a timeline. This timeline recounts early history of the county (pre-statehood) and continues into a more modern and industrialized McMinn County. Weaving through the museum, patrons will find display cases with exquisite material culture objects that are directly and indirectly tied to plantations, enslavers, and enslaved people, a storyline that is ignored, but then it addresses the difficult history of the Trail of Tears and Indigenous Removal Story, along with the region’s deeply rooted labor history.

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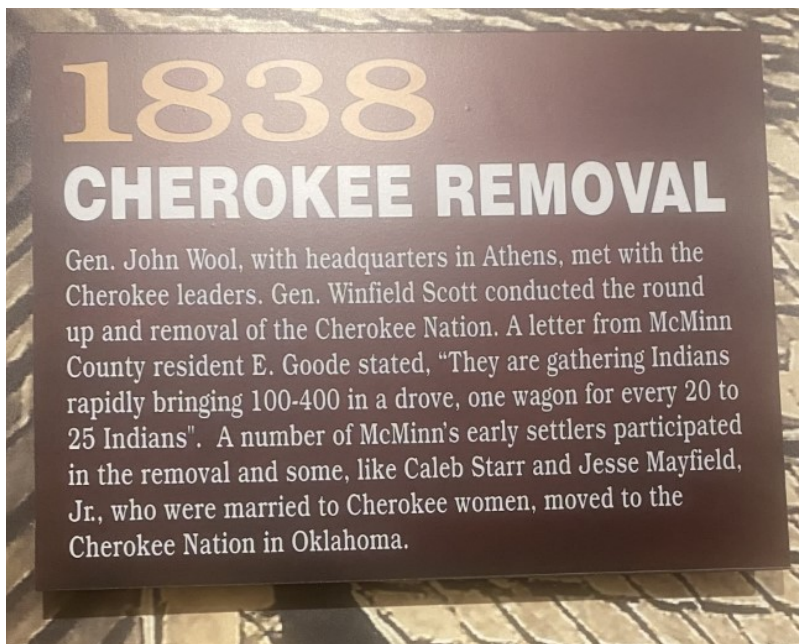
<sup>125</sup> McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, “What We Do,” 2021. <https://www.livingheritagemuseum.org/what-we-do>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 52. Timeline Exhibition Wall at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum.  
Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle*



*Figure 53. "1838 Cherokee Removal." Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

In addition to the difficult history concerning federally mandated Indigenous forced removal through the Trail of Tears beginning in the 1830s in Tennessee, the difficult history surrounding divided loyalties, much like Knox County, Greene County, and much of Appalachia, during the Civil War is interpreted. The people of McMinn County were deeply divided regarding loyalties to the Union or the Confederacy. In the decades before the Civil War, numbers reported of enslaved individuals in McMinn County was well over one thousand people. Despite the Tennessee state vote for secession in 1861, McMinn “County furnished troops to both Confederate and Union armies. While no major battles were fought within the county, thousands of troops passed through, and the area suffered severe economic hardships.”<sup>128</sup>

Slavery is addressed at the museum, but not as in depth as the interpretation found in Greeneville. On display are panels outlining the history of specific stories of enslaved individuals during the Civil War and freedmen post-emancipation from McMinn County. One family legacy that sticks out to visitors immediately is the story of the Richards’ family. Hannah Richards was born into enslavement in Virginia, and moved with enslaver Gabriel Richards to Tennessee in the early 1800s. Upon Mr. Richards’s death, Hannah was emancipated through a mandate in his will. Hannah’s life and story, while proving her resiliency, simultaneously speak to the fragility of Black freedom. Like other formerly enslaved individuals during this time, Hannah risked being put back into enslavement if found guilty of breaking a law. Hannah was arrested and charged with harboring an enslaved



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<sup>128</sup> McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, “What We Do,” 2021. [https://www.liv-  
ingheritagemuseum.org/what-we-do](https://www.liv-<br/>ingheritagemuseum.org/what-we-do).

man in 1828. Hannah's appeal went to the Tennessee Supreme Court, which returned the case to the McMinn County court. Fires at the courthouse destroyed any documentation of what happened next, although Hannah's troubles certainly did not end there. In about 1855, she was abducted and taken to a plantation in Alabama. She escaped and returned to McMinn County. The interpretation of Hannah Richard's life and legacy is fascinating, and the potential to connect her story with the difficult history surrounding being an African American woman in East Tennessee in the nineteenth century should be further explored and interpreted.

## THE LEGACY OF HANNAH RICHARDS

Hannah Richards was most likely born in Danville, Virginia, around 1800. Her life began as a slave owned by Gabriel Richards (1739-1826). In 1805, Richards and his slaves moved to Roane County and then moved to McMinn County shortly after. In 1826, Gabriel died, freeing Hannah in his will. In 1828, she was arrested and charged with harboring a certain Negro slave Sandy for two years without permission from his master. Hannah was fined \$2.20 for "harboring and entertaining" Sandy, \$2.00 for her jail fee, and 75¢ for the Justice of the Peace. If she did not pay these fines as well as an additional \$2.00, she could be forced back into slavery for nonpayment of debt. The appeal went to the Tennessee Supreme Court, which returned the case to the McMinn County court. Records of what happened next were lost due to fires at the courthouse, however, she remained free. Hannah's troubles continued when she was abducted and taken to Alabama. Luckily, she escaped and returned to her McMinn County home. It was never discovered if Hannah married, she did have a grandson, William, though. Hannah cleaned homes around Athens and William would join her and learn the alphabet from the children in the homes she was cleaning. Hannah must have been well-liked in the community considering her grandson was taken and some friendly white neighbors returned William to her. Hannah Richards died in 1889. Maintaining her and William's freedom and educating and encouraging a successful man, she accomplished extraordinary things for an African American woman in the 1800s.

William Henry Richards was born on January 15, 1856, in Athens, TN. His mother, Mary, died when he was four years old, leaving him to be raised by his grandmother, Hannah Richards. In 1864, William attended the Quaker school in Athens, Society of Friends mission school, and the Warner Institute in Jonesborough, TN. From 1873-1876, he taught school at the same Quaker school, as well as Mt. Harmony School. He met his mentor and close friend, Julia B. Nelson while they were both teaching in Athens. In 1878, he enrolled in Howard University in Washington, D.C., with a loan from Mrs. Nelson. He graduated valedictorian of his class, received his Master of Law degree in 1882, and was admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1887. To pay off his debt to Julia, he worked as a clerk at the United States Treasury Department for four years. In 1886, he returned to Athens to be with his grandmother. While in Athens, he became an alderman and the first black mayor of Athens. After Hannah died in 1889, William returned to Washington, D.C. where he worked for the United States Post Office and Interior Department; became a professor of law at Howard University; became president of alumni and historical societies; and argued two cases before the Supreme Court. In 1905, he worked on a case that gave women in the District of Columbia the right to be a partner in a joint-stock company. William Richards died on January 4, 1941, like his grandmother, accomplishing extraordinary things.

Figure 54. "The Legacy of Hannah Richards." Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.



Figure 55. "Hannah Richards of Athens, Tennessee. Tennessee Athens, ca. 1870. [Tennessee?, ?]." *The Library of Congress*.

Much of the interpretation in the larger spaces of the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum's downstairs exhibitions are dominated by the county's suffrage connection and stories, as Niota, the hometown of Tennessee Senator Harry T. Burn who made the swing vote decision to ratify the *19th Amendment*, and securing the constitutional right of voting rights for women in America 1920, is located in McMinn County.

The real focus on difficult history in McMinn County at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum is the deeply rooted connections to Indigenous heritage, including forced removal and the Trail of Tears. As detailed in Figure 56, McMinn County and the Cherokee ancestral lands were occupying the same general area. The small yellow star in Figure 56, provides a visual for the location of McMinn County.



Figure 56. Gene Thorp/Cartographic Concepts, Inc. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of the American Indian. Image modified by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

According to the McMinn County Historical Society and Archives:

Although large numbers of Cherokees had voluntarily left for new lands in the West, by 1828 the equally large number that remained continued to advance their own culture and reached a firmer synthesis and mutual coexistence with the White culture. In fact, one of the first successful American missionary activities was conducted in this area with the establishment of several mission schools that were educating the Cherokee children in large numbers. There were probably more Cherokees being educated in the region at this time than there were Whites.<sup>129</sup>

The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum has an area specifically dedicated to interpretation of the Indigenous story and removal, and the subsequent impact and consequences of removal within the region upon the local Indigenous people and others living within McMinn County. Treaties between white settlers, the federal government, and Indigenous tribes, including the Cherokee, were formally drafted as early as 1791 in what would later become the state of Tennessee.<sup>130</sup>

The interpretive panel titled “A Changing World,” details that in McMinn County and much of East Tennessee, “by 1800s, the Cherokees were dominated politically and dependent economically on the young American republic. Now the United States government and missionary societies worked together to implement a formal ‘civilization’ program aimed at transforming the Cherokees (and other Southeastern Indians on the new frontier) into model American citizens-Christian yeoman farmers, housewives, and children living in single family households.” The continued expansion of white settler values onto Cherokee culture

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<sup>129</sup> Steve Byrum, *McMinn County*, (Tennessee: Memphis State University, 1982); excerpt quoted in “McMinn County History - Excerpts from Byrum’s History,” McMinn County Historical Society and Archives.

<sup>130</sup> The Treaty of Holston was signed in 1791 and negotiated by territorial governor, William Blount.

and ways of life resulted in the Cherokee eventually becoming known as one of the Five Civilized Tribes. The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum emphasizes the intersectionality of the Cherokee and white settler culture, as many intermarriages took place, but the family units and children resulting from the intermarriages, “remained culturally conservative to varying degrees, most preferring to speak Cherokee and live by traditional Cherokee values which emphasized generosity and communal needs over individual rights and personal economic gain.”

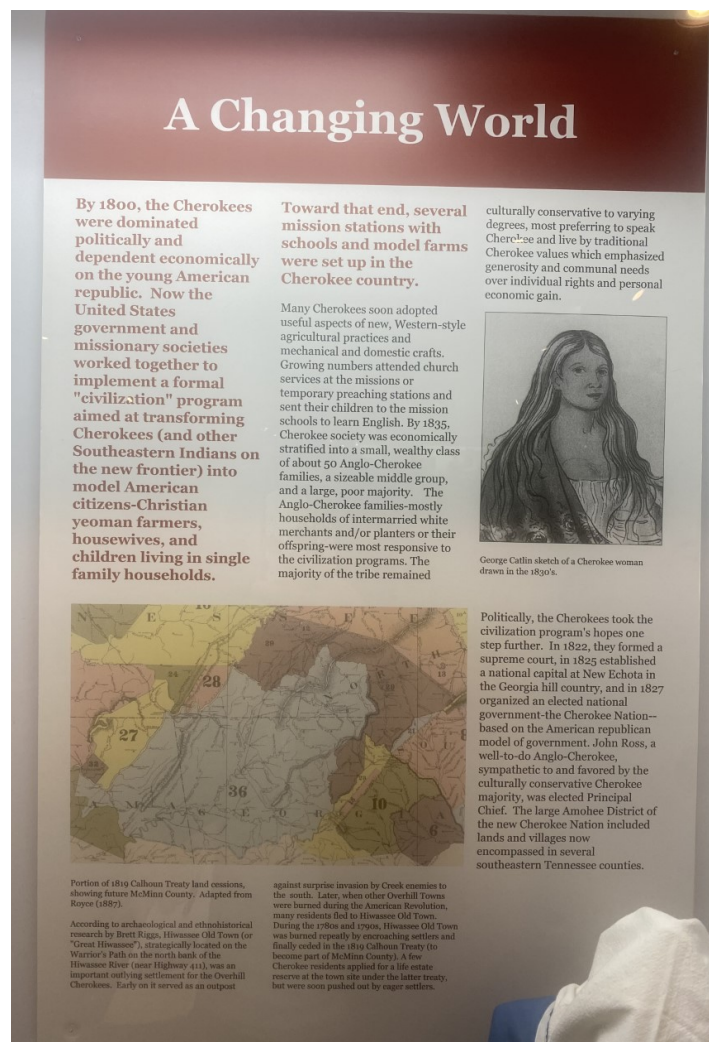


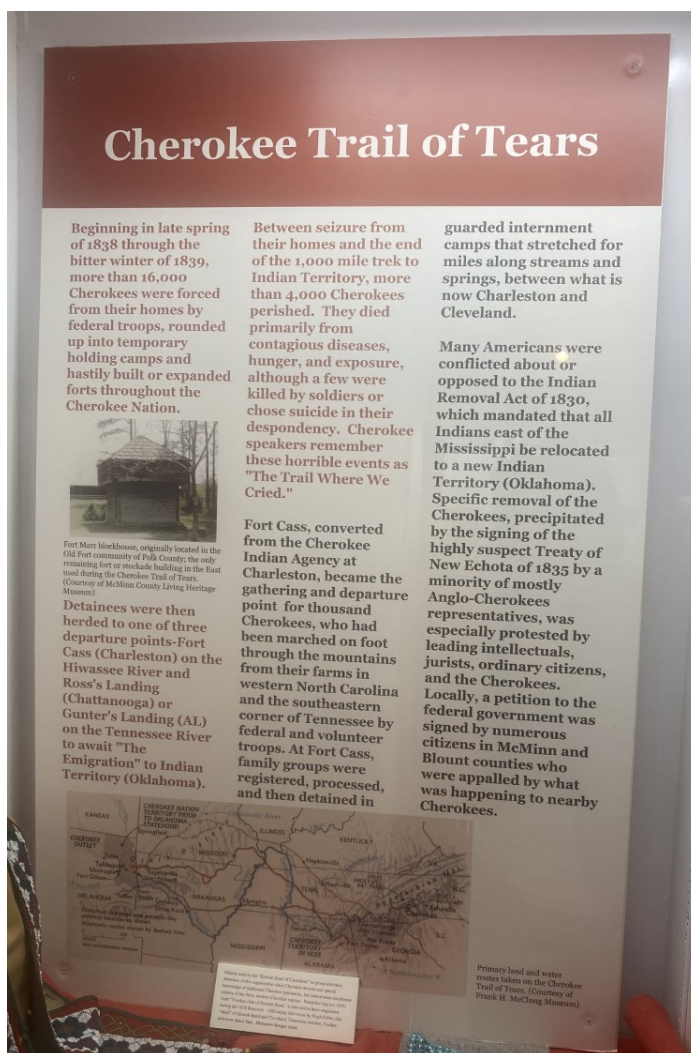
Figure 57. “A Changing World,” exhibition panel at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

Despite a dwindling Cherokee population in McMinn and surrounding counties in the early 1800s, removal gained momentum once, in the 1820s, gold was discovered in neighboring Monroe County. In 1835, the United States government and Cherokee Nation representatives signed the infamous Treaty of New Echota. The greatly disputed details of the Treaty of New Echota led to ceded ancestral lands to the federal government by Cherokee representatives in exchange for five million dollars and designated reservation land in Indian Territory, in what would later become the state of Oklahoma.<sup>131</sup> The events that unfolded from 1835 to 1839 as a result of the Treaty of New Echota and territorial expansion by the United States federal government in the southeastern region historically are now known as the Trail of Tears.

The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum continues to accurately interpret the difficult history of the Trail of Tears and the Cherokee people of McMinn County by using language that addresses the harsh and inhumane conditions suffered. In the interpretative panel titled “Cherokee Trail of Tears” the series of events are detailed for visitors, painting a picture of the hardships of forced migration.

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<sup>131</sup> Fred S. Rolater, “Treaties,” Carroll Van West, et al., Eds, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, Electronic Edition*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/treaties/>.



*Figure 58. "Cherokee Trail of Tears," exhibition panel at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.*

The interpretation of Cherokee life and presence in McMinn County does not end with the Trail of Tears. Interpretation of the difficult history of settler colonialism and forced removal sets the stage for the interpretive panel titled "After Removal: Those Who Remained" provides detailed interpretation of the estimated "1000-1200 people out of 18,000 Cherokees" who chose to remain "in their Eastern homeland soon after the Trail of Tears." The difficult history surrounding forced removal through the Trail of Tears continues to shared without hesitancy that "all Cherokees in McMinn and surrounding counties in

Tennessee appear to have been removed in 1838, but a few individuals and families returned during the next decade.”

The museum interpretation and text stresses that between 1838 and the early 1900s, due to forced removal and significant increases in racially motivated attacks, the great Cherokee nation that once dominated East Tennessee and McMinn County no longer had a significant presence in the region. The thoughtful interpretation of Cherokee history, before, during, and after the Trail of Tears at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum allows visitors to engage directly with the reality of difficult history, as much of the deeply rooted Cherokee stories and heritage in East Tennessee left with the tribes during forced removal and migration.



Figure 59. "After Removal: Those Who Remained," exhibition panel at the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum. Photograph taken by Layla Smallwood-Gabrielle.

While much of the story regarding the the institution of enslavement in McMinn County is not broadly interpreted, the material culture and primary sources are available to develop a more in depth narrative of the institution of enslavement in McMinn County. The interpretation for the Cherokee and the Trail of Tears is comprehensive, but when first entering the museum, can be challenging to locate. The wall displaying the timeline at the front entrance of the museum briefly mentions the Trail of Tears, but does not fully interpret the impact of the Cherokee downstairs in the main galleries. The interpretation and exhibition

panels for Cherokee history allow for great discussion and analyses of the information presented, but there are no real ways for visitors to interact with the exhibitions. I would suggest incorporating interpretive texts and materials culture items within the exhibit that encourage visitors to investigate more thoroughly.

To enhance the current information being interpreted, specifically around Indigenous history and the institution of enslavement, I would suggest that the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum work with community stakeholders and local and state historians and build upon the current narratives being interpreted. The museum interprets modern Black history, but the early Black history of the region still needs to be inclusively addressed. For example, Joe Guy detailed in “The Cleage Slaves and the Bricks of History” (2005), that enslaver “Samuel Cleage, the itinerant contractor who traveled into the Tennessee Valley from Virginia in the 1820s, is generally credited for the construction of several historic homes and buildings in East Tennessee, especially in McMinn County.”<sup>132</sup> While Cleage is often credited with construction, Guy pointed to the truth and difficult history of the enslaved and exploited labor used to make and lay the bricks, ultimately constructing the built landscape of McMinn County.

Guy explained that “Five structures that Cleage’s slaves built still stand in McMinn County: the Samuel Cleage House, the Van Dyke House, the Cate House, the Hiwassee Railroad Office and Mars Hill Presbyterian Church,” and continued that upon inspection of “the Hiwassee Railroad Office and Mars Hill Church with Travis Haun, curator at the

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<sup>132</sup> Joe Guy, “The Cleage Slaves and the Bricks of History,” *Hidden History*, 2005.

McMinn County Living Heritage Museum” that the additional “two structures, near downtown Athens, were indeed locally made by hand, with a fairly high degree of skill.”<sup>133</sup>

As Guy addressed the material culture and built landscape of Athens, Tennessee, he connected the bricks to the enslaved craftspeople and the lived experience enslaved individuals in McMinn County in the nineteenth century. This is just one instance of connections through material culture, but the interpretation opportunities are vast. In order to truly connect visitors to the past and maintain relevancy, I would suggest working with community stakeholders and descendant groups, as well as leading public historians, like the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive team, curators from local and state institutions, and other leaders and educators in the field in the field to learn from and actively continue to uncover regional topics of difficult history for McMinn County.

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<sup>133</sup> Joe Guy, “The Cleage Slaves and the Bricks of History,” *Hidden History*, 2005.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: A NATIONAL COMPARATIVE**

### **THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY**

For over 60 years, the American Association for State and Local History has worked to produce professional development opportunities and major conference events that speak to individual and institutional responsibility in accurately and inclusively interpreting history and historical events. The Annual Conferences from 2017 forward have strived for inclusivity, responsibility, and the centering of all stories and voices. AASLH has continuously worked to produce high quality professional development opportunities for public historians, while creating a culture that fosters both accountability and growth for professionals of the field. Through efforts emphasizing connections between history, preservation, and community outreach, the American Association for State and Local History continues to be unique in the advocacy efforts, resources provided, and the communities and institutions served. AASLH has been headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, for close to seventy years, and it serves the entire country by providing resources, publishing up-to-date research, and introducing frameworks. AASLH's beliefs, located on their website, further cement their dedication to inclusively and accurately reporting all histories:

We believe history matters. History connects people to each other and to something larger than themselves. People need history to understand the world around them and develop solutions for the future. We believe everyone makes history. Relevant history is inclusive history. Creativity and innovation inform our work as an organization, and collaborative partnerships and practices are key to advancing our mission. We are transparent in how we conduct our work as an association and as historians. We value

investing in individuals and organizations and youth along their personal and professional paths.<sup>134</sup>

One can trace the roots within historical societies across the United States that worked tirelessly to preserve state and local history in late late 1800s and early 1900s.

Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. argued that deep connections to grassroots historical societies and the founding of AASLH in 1940 can be accredited to the zeal and fervor of original founders.

Hosmer continued that zeal “is a timeless and essential ingredient in the recovery, preservation, and interpretation of local history.”<sup>135</sup>

Before the initial founding of AASLH, American Historical Association (AHA), organized the annual Conference of State and Local Historical Societies. Edward P. Alexander wrote that “The Conference of State and Local Historical Societies was organized in 1904 at Chicago during the annual after-Christmas meeting of the American Historical Association,” and resulted in joint sessions and the longstanding partnership with the AHA.<sup>136</sup> The memberships of the AHA in the early twentieth century included “executives of state historical societies, the faculty of university history departments, archivists, librarians, and local historians - chiefly from the West and the South” who actively collaborated on

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<sup>134</sup> “What We Believe,” American Association for State and Local History, 2021, <https://aaslh.org/about/what-we-believe/>.

<sup>135</sup> Charles B. Hosmer, Jr, “The Roots of AASLH,” in *Local History, National Heritage: Reflections on the History of AASLH*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 7.

<sup>136</sup> Edward P. Alexander, “Valiant Efforts and Good Intentions,” in *Local History, National Heritage: Reflections on the History of AASLH*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 37.

solutions to problems within the burgeoning field, celebrated successes, and planned for the future.<sup>137</sup>

Over the following decades, membership continued to grow, and institutional outreach and advocacy (by founding organizations) championed. In 1939, the thirty-fifth Annual Conference was held, and questions of individual membership and organizational restructuring, rather than limiting memberships solely to organizations, arose. A committee of fifteen appointed individuals representing different regions of North America issued a report of conclusions. The findings were reported in December 1940 and called for:

Twelve services that that the new organization ought to provide, including assisting patriotic and civic groups, the National Park Service, and the WPA Historical Records Survey; encouraging the writing of high-quality state and local histories; establishing adequate courses on these subjects in schools and universities; promoting closer coordination of state and local historical agencies; publishing the annual meeting proceedings, *The Handbook of Historical Societies* (formerly issued by the conference), a new periodical, and occasional books and pamphlets; holding annual meetings as well as conferences on common concerns and issues; and establishing an informational clearinghouse with a permanent secretary to run it. The clearinghouse would dispense fourteen classes of information, including how to organize and administer a historical agency, obtain donations and appropriations; operate a history museum, preserve and restore historic sites and buildings, erect historical markers; conduct historical tours; and stage historical celebrations and pageants.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to issued findings of the report, an institutional constitution was drafted, agreed upon, and signed in 1940, and the American Association for State and Local History was officially established. The newly founded institution “provided for welcoming individuals and institutions in the United States and Canada,” and required low annual

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<sup>137</sup> Edward P. Alexander, “Valiant Efforts and Good Intentions,” in *Local History, National Heritage: Reflections on the History of AASLH*, 37.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

membership fees in order “to encourage the largest possible membership” among professionals and institutions alike in the field of what would be eventually known as public history.<sup>139</sup>

A product of generational preservation efforts, Frederick L. Rath, Jr. pointed to the fact that AASLH was officially founded during the New Deal era and the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Much of the preservation and conservation efforts of this time were “signs of the time,” Rath argued and “must be coupled with the of the effect of the New Deal Programs and the work” and the efforts of many including “the state and historical societies and agencies” involved.<sup>140</sup> During this time of change “an even larger number of well-trained professionals, restless, impatient, visionary, and tireless, were pioneering in an effort to appreciate, recognize, save, and interpret the nation’s heritage.”<sup>141</sup>

In 1957 AASLH appointed Dr. Clement Silvestro as director of the young organization. Until his resignation in 1964, Dr. Silvestro worked to expand new programs and initiatives. Bill Alderson, “a historian by training” who had “risen to the directorship of the Tennessee State Library and Archives and Historical Commission,” and “had also served his apprenticeship in AASLH as a member and then Chair of the Awards Committee and as a

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<sup>139</sup> Edward P. Alexander, “Valiant Efforts and Good Intentions,” in *Local History, National Heritage: Reflections on the History of AASLH*, 39-40.

<sup>140</sup> Frederick L. Rath, Jr, “Local History and the New Deal,” in *Local History, National Heritage: Reflections on the History of AASLH*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 36.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

member of the Council,” was appointed Director of AASLH in 1964.<sup>142</sup> Under the direction of Alderson, the AASLH headquarters were moved Nashville, Tennessee, and the newly appointed director worked to tirelessly to expand existing programs, develop new ways to serve members and institutions, and truly approached growth from the boots on the ground perspective and ensured AASLH was a household name for public historians and institutions.

Since 1960, AASLH has worked and collaborated with public historians and other professionals relevant to the field to publish Technical Leaflets. The Technical Leaflets are guides created to share clear and concise information accessibly across topics. AASLH currently has published 299 Technical Leaflets that are available to members. The Technical Leaflets address issues in the field, and provide resources to readers on how to navigate topics of difficult history. AASLH alludes to the founding institutional ideals, and details on its website, “whether you are seeking information on management and administration, interpretation, research practices, or preservation techniques, or any other subject related to the practice of public history, there’s probably a Technical Leaflet that will help.”<sup>143</sup> AASLH’s track record of partnering with public historians and other notable institutions within the field of public history led to the creation of an invaluable collection of resources for those navigating topics deemed difficult history

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<sup>142</sup> Holman J. Swinney, “Realizing the Intentions,” in *Local History, National Heritage: Reflections on the History of AASLH*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 58-59.

<sup>143</sup> “Technical Leaflets,” American Association for State and Local History, 2021, <https://aaslh.org/publications/technical-leaflets/>.

In Technical Leaflet #186, “Reaching Teachers: Helping Them Teach State and Local History” (1993) Elise Schebler Dawson detailed strategies for museums and historical societies to provide resources for state and local history through educational outreach by connecting with educators. Dawson offered examples like creating and distributing fliers and teacher newsletters with important information about educational offerings, and suggested connecting with local and state education offices and teacher education programming to further promote resources available. In addition to promotion and outreach, Dawson advised that a major way to assist educators is to understand their curricula needs and developing programming and resources accordingly. While much has changed since Technical Leaflet #186 was originally published, the foundational concepts of “Reaching Teachers” still remains immensely relevant to educator outreach programs at historical organizations and museums and professional development programming. In order to reach educators, in 1993 or in 2023, organizations must maintain relevancy regarding curriculum and continue to work to meet the ever evolving status of educator needs when teaching accurate and inclusive state and local history.<sup>144</sup>

History museums should be constantly striving to maintain relevancy with different audiences. AASLH’s technical leaflets provide many resources including tips for maintaining relevance for small-to medium-sized regional history museums and institutions in an evolving world and public history sphere. In Technical Leaflet #273 “Demonstrating Relevance” (2015), Mark Sundlov outlines the importance of communication for public

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<sup>144</sup> Elise Schebler Dawson, Technical Leaflet #186, “Reaching Teachers: Helping Them Teach State and Local History,” (1993).

history institutions, and he explained that in order “to create broad relevance and support for history organizations, we must craft multiple messages for these multiple audiences.”<sup>145</sup> By intentionally working to communicate institutional missions with different audiences, Sundlov argued, the message will be more widely received, and the institutional reach will continue to increase among stakeholders. “Demonstrating Relevance” is another example of a blunt and helpful resource published through AASLH. In order to communicate and maintain relevancy among different audiences, Sundlov concluded that institutions need to honestly assess current outreach practices and relevancy strategies as “the days of assuming relevance, and being accusatory towards those who don’t understand our relevance, are long past.”<sup>146</sup>

The Technical Leaflets range in topic, but many provide tools, from helpful texts to examples of language shifts in the field of public history to allow for accessible education resources for teaching difficult history. The authors of Technical Leaflet #291 “Telling Inclusive Stories When Collections Are Stuck in the Past” (2020) provided concrete examples of inclusive interpretation despite collection restraints. Interpretation strategies suggested in this Technical Leaflet included the reinterpretation of stories by “interrogating how an object was used and preserved” to potentially “open up interpretation to include new people and narratives.”<sup>147</sup> The authors continued that through thoughtful reinterpretation,

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<sup>145</sup> Mark Sundlov, Technical Leaflet #273, “Demonstrating Relevance,” (2015), 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>147</sup> Meghan Gelardi Holmes, Steven Lubar, Jessie MacLeod, William Stoutamire, and Carrie Villar, Technical Leaflet #291, “Telling Inclusive Stories When Collections Are Stuck in the Past,” (2020), 2.

“exciting opportunities to see objects through a different lens, allowing us to gain insight into the experiences of those who interacted with them beyond merely owners or donors” emerge and new doors regarding interpretation are opened.”<sup>148</sup> By delving into the restructuring and reinterpretation of museum collections and previous interpretation strategies, “can begin to repair the years of erasure by making marginalized groups visible within the museum while drawing upon the resources that an institution already owns.”<sup>149</sup>

Technical Leaflet #293, “Interpreting Slavery with Children and Teens” (2021) proves to be another example of recent publications in partnership with AASLH that meets interpreting and teaching difficult history with solution-based resources. Kristin L. Gallas provided helpful tips to accurately and inclusively teach and interpret enslavement to younger generations of historic site visitors. In this Technical Leaflet, Gallas outlined the importance of “upending long-held narratives” surrounding the institution of enslavement, and continued “it helps if we explicitly acknowledge how identity plays a role in historical narratives, as it should help students adjust their expectations and open their minds to learning.”<sup>150</sup> Gallas further emphasized the importance of interpreting difficult history, like enslavement at plantation homes, to informed citizenship and accountability by closing with the following statement, “when an organization commits to doing school and family programs on the topic of slavery, it makes a promise to past and future generations to keep

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<sup>148</sup> Meghan Gelardi Holmes, Steven Lubar, Jessie MacLeod, William Stoutamire, and Carrie Villar, Technical Leaflet #291, “Telling Inclusive Stories When Collections Are Stuck in the Past,” (2020), 2.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>150</sup> Kristin L. Gallas, Technical Leaflet #293, “Interpreting Slavery with Children and Teens,” (2021), 3.

alive the memory of long-silenced millions and to raise awareness of the racist legacies of slavery in our society today. It is time for the public history field to contribute to a more equitable future for all United States citizens, and we can do that through our school, family, and public programming.”<sup>151</sup>

Technical Leaflet #296 “Interpreting the Histories of American Women” (2021), encouraged institutions and public historians to interpret history expand interpretation beyond the male impacts and perspectives. Heather Huyck emphasized the importance of interpreting the female story and argued that “women’s history is everyone’s history, and interpreting American history without the stories of all Americans is irresponsible.”<sup>152</sup> In Technical Leaflet #296, Huyck pushed public historians to look for invisible women in spaces of silences at historical sites. In order to uncover and learn from the silences, the author explained that “historic sites, museums, parks, and other organizations have three key elements that make them capable of interpreting the past in a meaningful and truthful manner.”<sup>153</sup>

The key elements, further explained by Huyck, tangible resources, knowledge base, and significance, all build off of one another. While Technical Leaflet #296 speaks directly to uncover women’s history, the same techniques can be applied to uncovering difficult history such as the institution of enslavement or the history of Indigenous removal. In addition to

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<sup>151</sup> Kristin L. Gallas, Technical Leaflet #293, “Interpreting Slavery with Children and Teens,” (2021), 8.

<sup>152</sup> Heather Huyck, Technical Leaflet #296, “Interpreting the Histories of American Women,” (2021), 2.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

providing step-by-step resources on interpretation strategies and best practices and outlining case studies, Technical Leaflet #296 also provided readers with a chart that can be used to evaluate historical interpretation of American women. With a few tweaks, this framework can be utilized to further assess interpretation of difficult history on various topics.

Technic

Red, Yellow, Green: Evaluation of Historic Locales for the History of American Women			
INTERPRETATION	TANGIBLE RESOURCES	KNOWLEDGE BASE	OTHER
Special and varied programs on different women	High quality conservation and both routine and cyclic housekeeping and maintenance	Uses many different sources very well	Partnerships with other key people and organizations
History of <i>all</i> women integrated into all programs all year	Uses them to research and portray women's history	Based on ongoing excellent research/good research collection	Thoughtful and creative programs and products
Women-centered	Missing key structures are represented/rebuilt	Strong academic and public history partnerships	Include enslaved housing and lives
Connect past with present concerns	Landscape changes explained	Include descendant communities	Reads between the lines
Accurate but not inspired or exciting	Historic landscape shrunk or has modern intrusions	Only uses secondary sources; minimal original scholarship	Staff trained in basics, but few experts
Many programs in March	Missing key buildings or alterations	Research incomplete	Sometimes in other programs
Focus on a few famous women	Misleading landscape	Research dated	Biographical, not historical
"Happy history" instead of real	Objects displayed not historically there	A few partnerships	Lacks context
Awful stereotypes of women	Uneven conservation program	Research full of stereotypes; moldy	Minimal training
Women ignored or stereotypically portrayed	Severely altered buildings and landscapes—intrusions, missing key elements	Mythical/anonymous sources and internet claims	All women "the same"; no recognition of diversity
Inaccurate statements; misleading and derisive	Kitchens and places where women worked either not restored or inaccessible	Old versions recycled without careful evaluation	Unable to answer basic questions
Women included only because of their husbands	Poor conservation methods or damaged resources	Weak or nonexistent partnerships	Inappropriate, gendered demonstrations

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Figure 60. "Evaluation of Historic Locales for the History of American Women." Heather Huyck.

Through community and institutional advocacy, AASLH has amassed an impressive following of public historians and museum professionals throughout North America. In maintaining their mission statement of inclusivity and innovation, in 2022, AASLH offered

two versions of their Annual Conference: one in person and one virtually. In 2023, the AASLA Annual Conference is themed around American Identity and is directly connected to a recent publication titled, *Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial* (2021). *Making History at 250*, a collaborative effort among historians and museum professionals includes “several themes to encourage inclusive, relevant histories and provide cohesiveness to a multi-faceted, grassroots commemoration.”<sup>154</sup>

In recent years, through publications and other professional development offerings, AASLH has provided frameworks and examples for regional, state, and local institutions, no matter the size, to emulate when approaching master planning and interpretation and education programming re-evaluation while in the midst of institutional transition and progress. “Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement” (2019), is a framework provided by scholars through AASLH that details strategies for effectively teaching historical concepts through open, informed dialogue. This specific framework includes recommendations, outlines for discussions, and encourages “shifting the conversation away from abstract truth and toward grounded, critical engagement” to build a broader “understanding of historical interpretation and the value of inclusive history.”<sup>155</sup>

In addition to formal publications, AASLH’s blogs serve as an informal, informational hub for both established and emerging public historians. AASLH Chief of

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<sup>154</sup> *Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial*, American Association for State and Local History, (Tennessee: Nashville, 2021), <http://download.aaslh.org/Making+History+at+250+Field+Guide.pdf>.

<sup>155</sup> Theresa L. Miller, Andrew Volmert, Emilie L’Hôte, Mia Aassar, and April Callen, “Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement,” 2019, 18, <http://download.aaslh.org/Research/FWI-Reframing-History-Report.pdf>.

Operations, Bethany Hawkins, recently wrote the blog post, “5 Ways to Make Your Historic House Museum Visitors Feel at Home (Even with Uncomfortable Topics),” and touched upon strategies used by a historic home in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Oaklands Mansion, to fully interpret accurate and often uncomfortable history and legacies. Hawkins wrote that many in the museum and public history field have “constrained ourselves for years with our mission statements and collection policies freezing our historic houses in time and, as a result, constructing a barrier between our visitors and the connection to place.”<sup>156</sup> To combat this, Hawkins suggested an easy-to-follow thought process for those working in and curating interpretation and education programs for small- to medium-sized historic institutions and house museums.

Hawkins first and foremost advised for the continuation of research to collect, interpret, and educate inclusively as new research and stories become available. This suggested framework includes connecting time periods within collections across eras to provide further relevancy to the historic timelines presented. While many might consider this strategy a bit misleading or confusing to visitors, Hawkins continued that displaying artifacts, photos, etc., from different, relevant time periods will allow for visitors to make connections to their own homes, families, and lives. Promoting diversity in interpretation increases relevancy to visitors while also expanding overall reach. In order to connect visitors with space and across eras, making connections using material culture objects also help bridge the gaps and engage visitors when interpreting difficult history. Material culture objects go

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<sup>156</sup> Bethany Hawkins, “5 Ways to Make Your Historic House Museum Visitors Feel at Home (Even with Uncomfortable Topics),” 2022, AASLH, <https://aaslh.org/5-ways-house-museum/>

beyond surface level interpretation and have the ability “to connect visitors to the lives of those who left little evidence in the written record has led museums to seek out new kinds of witnessing objects.”<sup>157</sup>

Hawkins’ final points alluded to areas of contention that many museums, historic homes, and organizations have grappled with and are continuing to navigate in 2022: making the story inclusive and not shying away from or being “afraid to talk about the hard stuff in the parlor.” By addressing difficult histories and topics before visitors interact fully with the historical content, public historians are able to provide context and agency, beyond the pretty pieces of art displayed or lovely, French-imported wall paper hanging in entry ways.<sup>158</sup> In moving beyond the surface level of interpreting material culture artifacts, public historians can tell the human stories and legacies that are often silo-ed or tagged as difficult history through a much more informative and person-first lens.

In a historic, antebellum plantation home this strategy might look like addressing immediately the difficult history surrounding enslavement and the enslaved individuals who worked in the home and greeted visitors upon arrival. Addressing how an enslaved groomsmen might have greeted important guests and ensured their carriages and horses were taken to the stables, or how an enslaved person in the home might have greeted visitors at the front doors and directed them to the parlor, allows for in-depth discussion, and allows visitors

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<sup>157</sup> Rebecca Shrum, “Material Culture,” *Inclusive Historian’s Handbook*, Co-Sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History and the National Council on Public History, June 2019, <https://inclusivehistorian.com/material-culture/>.

<sup>158</sup> Bethany Hawkins, “5 Ways to Make Your Historic House Museum Visitors Feel at Home (Even with Uncomfortable Topics),” 2022, AASLH, <https://aaslh.org/5-ways-house-museum/>.

to truly go through the nonlinear stages of Julia Rose's Commemorative Museum Pedagogy 5Rs.

In addition to addressing the best interpretative practices at historic house museums, AASLH also offers examples of inclusive programming and interpretation at plantation sites that serve as tourist hubs and sites of historical recognition of difficult history. When incorporating difficult historical topics like previous silencing of enslavement at plantation homes, Executive Director of the Whitney Plantation, Ashley Rogers suggested connecting the interpretation to labor and contributions of enslaved individuals who “cleared the land, milled the wood, fired the bricks, built the houses, and tended land and livestock on plantations,” as “plantations were predominantly black spaces built and maintained by black people against their will.”<sup>159</sup>

*AASLH's Reframing History Report titled Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement* (2022), addressed the recent tumultuous associations between history and the media reporting. The report and “framing strategy is the result of a two-year, deep-dive research project undertaken in partnership with the American Association for State and Local History, the National Council on Public History, and the Organization of American Historians and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,” and the research provided a

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<sup>159</sup> Ashley Rogers, “Plantations,” *Inclusive Historian's Handbook*, Co-Sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History and the National Council on Public History, May 2019, <https://inclusivehistorian.com/plantations/>

“framing strategy, which includes a set of specific recommendations for communicators.”<sup>160</sup>

*Making History Matter* addressed the recent political debates surrounding historical interpretation and understanding. In addition to the report issued, the research team also published a Reframing History Toolkit for educators, museum professionals, and public historians “to facilitate more effective communication with the public about history: why it matters, how it can be interpreted, and why it is important to incorporate critical thinking and a multitude of diverse perspectives in the ways we understand it.”<sup>161</sup>

Through the Reframing History Report and Toolkit, the researchers made four specific recommendations for those in the field. The Report provided frameworks for how to address current public perceptions regarding each recommendation, how to address misconceptions, and how to reframe the importance and relevancy of *Making History Matter* to all people. The first recommendation, “Talk about critical thinking to shift perceptions about what history involves,” encouraged critical discussions and understandings of historical events, people, etc. from different perspectives while grounding the historical interpretation in relevancy. Highlighting critical thinking skills in historical interpretation and understanding “helps people see that history can be rigorous and grounded while admitting discussion of different ideas and reconsideration of old understandings,” while

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<sup>160</sup> Theresa L. Miller, PhD, Andrew Volmert, PhD, Emilie L’Hôte, PhD, Mia Aassar, & April Callen, Reframing History Report, *Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2022), 5. <http://download.aaslh.org/Research/FWI-Reframing-History-Report.pdf>.

<sup>161</sup> Clara Gibbons, Theresa L. Miller, PhD, Andrew Volmert, PhD, Emilie L’Hôte, PhD, Mia Aassar, & April Callen, Reframing History, “Making History Matter: Toolkit for Communicators,” (Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 2022) <http://download.aaslh.org/Research/FWI-Reframing-History-Toolkit.pdf>.

simultaneously making room for “a productive way of thinking about the validity of evidence-based interpretation that avoids cuing and reinforcing people’s unproductive assumptions about a singular historical ‘truth’ that must simply be found and reported.”<sup>162</sup>

The second recommendation of the report, “compare historical interpretation to detective work to deepen understanding of historical practice” built upon what many educators and public historians have encouraged students and learners to do - think like an historian and investigate the primary and secondary sources being presented.<sup>163</sup> In presenting the historical investigation, the Report encouraged others to engage with the “evidence using various tools and methods to see how the ‘clues’ all fit together,” to update previous understandings of the past.<sup>164</sup>

Building heavily on the foundation of Recommendation One and Two, Recommendation Three encouraged connecting the importance of critically understanding historical events, people, etc. and learning from previous instances of historical wrong doings, while heavily focusing on progress. Recommendation Three specifically urged educators, public historians, and museum professionals working within the public sphere to “emphasize how history helps us make progress toward a just world to increase recognition

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<sup>162</sup> Theresa L. Miller, PhD, Andrew Volmert, PhD, Emilie L’Hôte, PhD, Mia Aassar, & April Callen, Reframing History Report, *Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement*, (Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 2022), 7. <http://download.aaslh.org/Research/FWI-Reframing-History-Report.pdf>.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 9.

of history’s importance.”<sup>165</sup> For this specific step in the framework, the researchers and authors suggested approaching the public with the following ideals “We believe history can—and should— be used to move our country forward. Making progress means studying the past, grappling with where we’ve gone wrong, and learning from what we’ve done right ... we are committed to pursuing a more just future through engaging with the past.”<sup>166</sup>

Recommendation Four encouraged straightforward language to avoid confusion due to jargon, and is grounded in use[ing] concrete, location-specific, solutions-focused examples to build support for inclusive history,” and make the research, resources, and solutions, accessible to the public. True to their foundation name and mission, State and Local history groundbreakers AASLH and other publishing partners for the *Making History Matter* Report, recommended providing and integrating examples into the work to make heightened connections to the public, and to also increase relevancy by going local with work as “using local museums, historical sites, or events to show what it means to engage with different perspectives and sources of history can help people see the value in this approach.”<sup>167</sup>

The American Association for State and Local History has provided high-quality resources for members and those within the field of public history for many decades, and continues to be an invaluable source for accessible information. As previous generations of

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<sup>165</sup> Theresa L. Miller, PhD, Andrew Volmert, PhD, Emilie L’Hôte, PhD, Mia Aassar, & April Callen, Reframing History Report, *Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement*, (Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 2022), 9. <http://download.aaslh.org/Research/FWI-Reframing-History-Report.pdf>, 10.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

public historians and museum professionals navigated difficult history, AASLH offered publications and developed additional offerings to meet the needs of the field. As museums and historical institutions work tirelessly to move into the modernity of the twenty-first century and accurately and inclusively interpret and teach difficult history, AASLH will continue to be hub for knowledge, accessibility, growth, and change.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Strategies for teaching and interpreting difficult history continue to evolve as research on the topic constantly grow and develop. As educators and museum professionals approach teaching and interpreting difficult history, the key points introduced by Julia Rose's *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (2006) are useful to start. While the field of public history offers multiple opportunities for discourse and networking through professional development opportunities like in person and virtual conferences. As the field and the research continue to evolve, the strategies should also remain fluid. When interpreting difficult history, keeping the jargon to a minimum and maintaining transparency with community members and stakeholders are key when making relevant, lasting connections with the public.

As highlighted in a previous chapter, studies suggest that museums and institutions are highly trusted by public audiences, and in order to maintain that level of trust, all voices and stories must be considered and interpreted, including difficult historical topics. Hot button concepts like Critical Race Theory have been highly politicized, and have essentially desensitized many to differentiate between what historical interpretation is and what is simply being politicized for popularity in the moments of heightened tensions regarding historical thinking, anti-racist education, and properly understanding and interpreting topics under the umbrella of difficult history concerning difficult historical concepts, events, and people.

As a result of my time studying and working with small-to medium-sized regional history museums in Appalachia, I have learned that the artifacts and stories are readily available in collections, and the institutions are more than capable and ready to accurately interpret topics of difficult history in East Tennessee. Full interpretative overhauls are not realistic for these institutions, and are not necessary. By shifting focuses on artifacts and documents, to the stories of those who created the artifact or penned the documents, interpretation will have the potential to be especially powerful when interpreting difficult history to the public. Highlighting artifacts that are potential witnessing objects, or allowing visitors or outreach groups to interact with replicas of material culture displayed, not only increases the relevancy of the interpretation, but also encourages increased engagement with the stories and artifacts already displayed at many of the small-to medium-sized institutions. Haidy Geismer argued in *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age* (2018), that “object lessons in museums present contemporary meanings and narratives around collections,” while also emphasizing “the processes through which knowledge is constructed.”<sup>168</sup>

In addition to the continued incorporation of material culture focused interpretation when addressing difficult history, I would also recommend that institutions focus on addressing language shifts within the field of public history. Many small-to medium-sized institutions do not have the funding or resources available to change interpretation panels and text as language best practices changes. Language within in the field is constantly evolving, so it comes down to the public historians and museum professionals to ensure that, when

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<sup>168</sup> Haidy Geismer, *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age*, (London: UCL Press, 2018), 1.

words are not enough, the difficult history remains accurately and inclusively interpreted to audiences of all sorts.

In order to ensure accessibility of information, I would suggest providing clear, concise but informative text for interpretive panels. Without proper historical context, many museum artifacts are left completely open to public interpretation. As addressed in the previous paragraph, many small-to medium-sized regional museums do not have the funding or resources to constantly update information displayed in gallery exhibitions, but I do think there is a way to incorporate change within the institutional constraints. One suggestion would be to create QR codes or other scan-able and easily accessible resources within the gallery that direct visitors to the newest interpretive updates and findings. While some visitors will not be able to access the QR codes due to lack of technology, grant funding could potentially be awarded and allocated among small-to medium-sized museums that qualify to include accessible tablets or other printed resources for visitors or school groups to access and unpack the fuller stories of all history, including difficult history.

In Chapter IV's case studies I suggest for the creation of a database for small- to medium-sized institutions to access, rent, collaborate on panels and information to tell a more cohesive, accurate, and inclusive narrative regarding difficult history. While stories to specific to each town, region, etc. are different, need for open and equitable accessibility to resources such as exhibition panels with a unified state narrative of key events would prove to close some of the financial distances between larger, state institutions and small-to medium-sized institutions. Accessibility to resources has been proven time and time again to

be a foundational piece to success, and if given similar tools, I do think heightened inclusivity and interpretation at regional museums of difficult history would allow for greater public engagement by locals and visitors and increase community stakeholders buy-in.

As briefly addressed in Chapter One, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU provides free and accessible educational resources across content areas and grade levels. Many of the resources available through TPS-MTSU highlight topics of difficult history, including but not limited to the institution of enslavement, abolitionist efforts, Indigenous removal, and labor history. While many educators and museum partners, especially in Middle Tennessee, are aware of the materials available through TPS-MTSU and the Library of Congress, some other state partners are only beginning to realize the resources available. While not highlighted as a regional chapter example in this dissertation as the focus was more heavily on the responsibility of history museums, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU also serves as a regional example and resource that can and should be utilized by educators and museum partners to bridge gaps in curriculum as needed. Resources created and distributed through Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU are updated frequently, distributed freely, directly tied to Tennessee state social studies standards, and provide curricula examples for teaching social studies, including topics of difficult history, through a primary source-based lens.

Through my work experience with Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, I have learned how important it is to learn from and to include educators as key stakeholder voices when creating, presenting, and revising educational frameworks, strategies, and resources. In 2022, building upon my previous research and work, I had the opportunity to partner with

Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU to create a resource guide for teaching history grounded in both place and space using regional specific examples throughout the state of Tennessee. While my dissertation specifically focuses on the importance of teaching difficult history in Appalachia and the responsibilities of modern, regional history museums, the strategies for connecting place and space learning is foundational when interpreting difficult history and identities. The resource guide details that:

Teaching accurate history grounded in place and space can allow for students to have a deep and meaningful learning experience. Many people take for granted the paths we walk and drive along each day, and often do not offer a second thought for those who walked or navigated the streets before our current time. Understanding the impact of local and state histories and events creates a storyline that aligns the past, present, and future.<sup>169</sup>

The information above is grounded in place and space, but it is important to acknowledge that all difficult history represents a space, and inhabits a place that is foundational to understanding identities and intersectionality. As Dr. Elizabeth Catte argued in *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* (2018), Appalachia is much more than the images and stereotypes media or historic propaganda have put forth to the general public.<sup>170</sup> The region is deeply-rooted in stories of diversity and turmoil, spanning from generations of difficult history. The concept of a singular Appalachian voice is a disservice to the region, and disregards the complex history, contributions, and kinship of the region.

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<sup>169</sup> Teaching with Primary Sources-Middle Tennessee State University, “Teaching Social Studies Grounded in Place and Space,” Lesson Plan, 2022. [https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=69882926](https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=69882926).

<sup>170</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*, (Ohio: Belt Publishing, 2018).

As small-to medium-sized regional history museums in Appalachia continue to address difficult local history, emphasizing the importance of community-based learning and outreach programs are essential. Often, small-to medium-sized history museums are the main source of educational history outreach for local schools. The resources of the institutions in this study vary, but all have limited staff compared to larger state and federal institutions. While local, state, and federal grants and funding are available to small-to medium-sized history museums, many do not have the capacity or resources to apply for external sources of funding. The resources available through AASLH, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, and other regional organizations allow for bridging gaps and working towards a more equitable future for small-to medium-sized institutions like the history museums addressed in this dissertation. Organizations, like AASLH and Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, ensure that everyone can come to the table and learn, discuss, and engage with all history, including topics of difficult history and are paving the way for more inclusive and accurate interpretation and diverse representation.

While the resources for accurate and inclusive interpretation of difficult history are available through AASLH, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU, and other public history organizations for little-to-no cost, the resources are not being taken advantage of as extensively as needed, especially by small, local history museums. Smaller museums have small budgets, smaller staff sizes, and much more limited capacities for additional training, professional development, and outreach opportunities. The need for relevancy and updated interpretation for topics like enslavement and Indigenous removal to reflect best practices in

the public history field has to be addressed, but it proves to be challenging when many small-to medium-sized history museums are trying to just stay afloat in a constantly evolving field.

The Greeneville-Greene County History Museum and the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum are both relatively young in establishment compared to the institutional history of the East Tennessee Historical Society, and the smaller museums do not receive the same level of funding, professional recognition, or regional coverage as their mid-sized counterpart. It is clear that as a mid-sized, regional institution, the East Tennessee Historical Society has access to more resources and larger funding pools than compared to the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum or the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum. The history of ETHS as the leading historic institution and a society in East Tennessee dates back almost two hundred years and has resulted in ETHS creating the groundwork for small, local institutions and history museums.

While the East Tennessee Historical Society has a much larger staff and budget than the two small, local history museums, the discrepancies between the institutions do not solely reflect the budgetary differences. ETHS attracts public historians and educators nationally, and provides competitive salaries and benefits for full-time employees, and continues to be a publishing force within the field of public history and in the state of Tennessee. The current director of ETHS, Dr. Warren Dockter, is an East Tennessee local, but has previously taught in universities in the United Kingdom and is well-connected within academia and the public history sphere. Vice President and Curator of Education, Lisa Oakley is an extremely well-known educator and public historian in the field. ETHS continues to partner to with state and national partners to engage in critical review of difficult history interpretation. As reflected

by the success of the East Tennessee Historical Society, continuous training and education for public historians and those working at small-to mid-sized history museums must happen to ensure up-to-date best practices, relevancy, and accurate and inclusive research reflected in exhibitions and publications.

The responsibilities of the twenty-first century museum are to continue to do the work, unflinchingly, and face the controversy of a highly-politicized atmosphere surrounding difficult history. Many would argue that small-to medium-sized institutions complete just as much work and have just as great an impact as larger, state-based institutions and move forward, fearlessly, often, with less access to resources. When I began this dissertation research, I had only started working alongside small-to mid-sized museums and non-profit institutions. I truly had no clue the levels of tenacity, commitment, and resiliency that have historically come from and continue to spew forth with urgency from the small and mid-size institutions to tell inclusive, full stories of the Appalachian region with regards to regional difficult history.

Without small-to medium-sized institutions in Appalachia like the East Tennessee Historical Society, the Greeneville-Greene County History Museum, The McMinn County Living Heritage Museum, doing the actual boots on the ground work within their local communities, the regional history would not be accurately represented. In addition to the small and mid-sized institutions, national, grass-roots public history advocacy groups such as the American Association for State and Local History have provided guidance and resources for decades for small-to medium-sized state and local institutions to become accredited, immersed in the field, and aware of policies, standards, and best practices. While there is still

always going to be research to be done and work to be executed for regional institutions in Appalachia to interpret difficult history more accurately and fully, the work is being done, precedents of sharing inclusive, diverse, and accurate interpretation are being set, and a path is being forged for future endeavors by those in the field who understand the importance and value of small-to mid-sized regional history museums.

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Appendix A: “American Citizenship: 1865-1965” presented with Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU faculty and staff at both the 2020 Tennessee Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference and the National Council for History Education Annual Conference

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**TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU**  
**Lesson Plan: American Citizenship 1865 to 1965**

**Grades:** High School  
**Subject:** U.S. History, Government, English Language Arts  
**Time Required:** one class period  
**Author:** Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU

**OVERVIEW**

From 1865 to 1965, the people of the United States wrestled with what it meant to be a citizen. From the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans, women, and American Indians struggled to have their full citizenship recognized throughout the nation. This lesson plan compares the struggles and triumphs of each group challenging students to think about how the nature of citizenship changed in the country during this period. This lesson plan can be used as a review to draw larger connections throughout U.S. history.

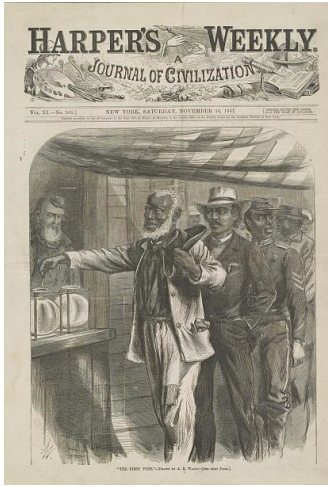
**UNDERSTANDING GOAL**

Students will understand how citizenship in the United States evolved from the end of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement.

**OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

- Analyze primary sources related to African American, women, and Native Americans thinking about the economic, social, and political impacts of their struggle for full citizenship.
- Compare the struggles and triumphs of each of these groups in order to thoughtfully address the larger question of how citizenship evolved in the United States.



["The first vote"](#) [1867 November 16.]

**CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

U.S. History

US.02 Examine federal policies toward American Indians, including: the movement to reservations, assimilation, boarding schools, and the Dawes Act.

US.03 Explain the impact of the Compromise of 1877, including: Jim Crow laws, lynching, disenfranchisement methods, the efforts of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and the Exodusters, and the Plessy v. Ferguson decision.

US.07 Describe the differences between “old” and “new” immigrants, analyze the assimilation process for “new” immigrants, and determine the impacts of increased migration on American society..

US.18 Describe the movement to achieve suffrage for women, including: the significance of leaders such as Carrie Chapman Catt, Anne Dallas Dudley, and Alice Paul, the activities of suffragettes, the passage of the 19th Amendment, and the role of Tennessee as the “Perfect 36”.

US.80 Describe the significant events in the struggle to secure civil rights for African Americans...

US.81 Analyze civil and voting rights legislation...

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION**

How did the meaning of American citizenship evolve between 1865 to 1965?

**CURRICULUM STANDARDS CONTINUED**Government

GC.31 Describe what should be reasonably expected from any citizen or resident of the U.S., and explain why it is important for the well-being of the nation, including: Being informed on civic issues; Obeying the law; Paying taxes; Respecting the rights of others; Serving as a juror; Serving in the military or alternative service; Volunteering and performing public service; Voting

GC.34 Describe the means that citizens use to participate in the political process...

English Language Arts

11-12.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources.

11-12.SL.CC.1 Initiate and participate effectively with varied partners in a range of collaborative discussions on appropriate 11th -12th grade topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly and persuasively.

11-12.SL.CC.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media formats in order to make informed decisions and solve problems; evaluate the credibility and accuracy of each source and note any discrepancies among the data.

11-12.W.RBPK.7 Conduct and write short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem by narrowing or broadening the inquiry when appropriate, synthesizing multiple sources on the subject, and demonstrating a new understanding of the subject under investigation.

**RESOURCES**

## Group 1:

- [The First Vote](#)
- [Clinton, TN. School integration conflicts](#)
- [The first colored senator and representatives - in the 41st and 42nd Congress of the United States](#)
- [\[History class, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama\]](#)
- [\[Smoke billowing over Tulsa, Oklahoma during 1921 race riots\]](#)
- [\[Flag, announcing lynching, flown from the window of the NAACP headquarters on 69 Fifth Ave., New York City\]](#)
- [Freedom Riders Seek to Integrate Southern Transportation](#)
- [Emancipation](#)
- [We demand voting rights now](#)
- [Are they equal in the eyes of the law?](#)
- [James G. Thompson, Letter to the Editor](#)

## Group 2:

- ["Move on!" Has the Native American no rights that the naturalized American is bound to respect?](#)

- [Immigration: Native American Citizenship](#)
- [Historical caricature of the Cherokee nation](#)
- [Carlisle Indian School](#)
- [Indian School, Cherokee, N.C.](#)
- [Consistency](#)
- [Native American Code Talkers](#)
- [Dawes Act/Indian Land for Sale](#)
- [Navajo Code Talkers](#)

## Group 3:

- [The age of brass. Or the triumphs of woman's rights](#)
- [The awakening](#)
- [Official program - Woman suffrage procession, Washington, D.C. March 3, 1913](#)
- [Women lining up at the polls in Wyoming](#)
- [Susan B. Anthony's fine](#)
- [Why women want to vote](#)
- [First Negro Nurses Land in England](#)

**MATERIALS**

- [Citizenship Timeline Poster](#)
- [Primary Source Notes Worksheet](#) (two-sided)
- [ESP Worksheet](#)

[The awakening](#)  
[1915 February 20]

**PROCEDURE**

Step 1	Begin by discussing how we define citizenship. What are the key rights and responsibilities of a citizen? You may wish to make a list of key characteristics as students discuss to display throughout the lesson.
Step 2	Next discuss the historical context for the nation in 1865. What was the citizenship status for African Americans, women, and American Indians? What rights did each group have at the end of the Civil War? You may allow students to do some quick research to fill in any gaps in their knowledge for this context.
Step 3	Divide the class into three groups. Explain to your students that each group will be working with a group of sources related to one of the three groups: African Americans, women, or American Indians. Give each group <a href="#">their sources</a> . Ask the students to place their sources in chronological order and allow time for a quick informal gallery walk.
Step 4	Within each of the three groups, have students either individually or in pairs select one source to analyze more closely using the <a href="#">ESP worksheet</a> . Take a moment to review the worksheet with students before having them begin.
Step 5	Have your students go back to their original groups. Ask the students to put their sources back into chronological order with their ESP worksheets up on the wall for a second gallery walk.
Step 6	Distribute the <a href="#">primary source notes worksheet</a> (Note: this is a two-sided worksheet) and take a moment to go over the worksheet. Explain that students will analyze six different sources (two from each source group), including the first source they have already analyzed, and consider the investigative question. For each source students will answer the same questions.
Step 7	Show students the <a href="#">Citizenship Timeline poster</a> and provide a copy to each student (Note: this can be a digital copy). Using the timeline poster and their notes worksheet, ask students to write a response to the investigative question: How did the meaning of American citizenship evolve from 1865 to 1965? The written response can be homework and turned in at the beginning of the next class period.

**EVALUATION**

- Group Work—20%
- ESP Worksheet—20%
- Primary Source Notes Worksheet—20%
- Written Response Investigative Question—40%



[Consistency](#) [1891]

**EXTENSION**

- Ask your students to identify other groups to add to the timeline. Then have them research relevant events and find sources for this group. How does the new group's fight for citizenship compare with those previously explored?
- Extend the timeline to today. Have students work in their original groups to identify events and sources to extend their groups' fight for citizenship to today. Then have your students reflect on how successful each group has been. What struggles does each group still face?
- Reach out to local civics groups that work with each of these groups, possible examples include the League of Women Voters and the NAACP. Invite these groups to meet with your class to discuss both the organizations' current work and the students' findings from this lesson plan.

[Photograph of Navajo Indian Code Talkers Henry Bake and George Kirk, 12/1943](#)



Primary Source:			
How does this source connect to the fight for citizenship for this group?			
<b>CONTEXT</b>			
Economic	Social	Political	
<b>CONSEQUENCES</b>			
Economic	Social	Political	



Source Title and Date:	How does this source connect to the quest for full citizenship?	How is the source similar to the original source? Different?	Other notes:
Source #4			
Source #5			
Source #6			

Appendix B: “Cost of Progress: Examining Labor in Appalachia in the Aftermath of the Second Industrial Revolution” presented at the 2022 National Council for History Education Conference by Kira Duke and Layla Smallwood

# Cost of Progress: Examining Labor in Appalachia in the Aftermath of the Second Industrial Revolution

Kira Duke, Teaching with Primary Sources-MTSU  
Layla Smallwood, East Tennessee Historical Society



Primary Source:	
<p><b>Objective Observation:</b> Describe the source. Your description should help someone who has not seen the source to visualize it.</p>	<p><b>Subjective Observation:</b> Describe your personal feelings, associations, and judgments about the source. For example, "I see . . . , and it makes me think of . . ."</p>
<p><b>Knowledge:</b> Record prior knowledge based on experience, study, assumptions, and intuitions.</p>	<p><b>Deduction:</b> Make conclusions based on your observations and knowledge.</p>
<p>What was it like to be a worker in the midst of the second Industrial Revolution?</p>	

## Four themes for group work

- Income inequality
- Harsh working and living conditions
- Pollution
- Child labor



Think about how your primary source ties into economic issues (e.g., impacts wages, trade, standard of living, etc.), social issues (e.g., impacts class, race, gender, etc.), and political issues (e.g., impacts lawmaking, public policy, voting, etc.). Fill in your observations & reflections in the appropriate columns. If you can't think where to put a comment, write it in the miscellaneous box below.

Economic	Social	Political
Miscellaneous		

This worksheet is based on a model from Yohuru Williams, *Teaching U.S. History Beyond the Textbook: Six Investigative Strategies, Grades 5-12* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2009).

## Regional Examples - Industrial Revolution in Appalachia

- The strategies for this part of today's session can be implemented across content and grade levels.
- We will be "layering" the activity and providing multiple in-depth analysis handouts and opportunities to provide examples of grade level specific options and differentiation.
- **Investigative Questions:**
  1. What was it like to be a worker in the midst of the second Industrial Revolution in Appalachia?
  2. What were the regional social costs of widespread industrialization in the early twentieth century?

### Step One: Artifact Investigation

#### Questions to Consider:

- What material(s) is the artifact pictured made out of?
- Does the artifact look handmade or mass produced by a machine?
- When would you date this artifact?
- Who would have used these artifact?
- What other artifacts might a person have used with the artifact pictured?
- How does this artifact relate to the Industrial Revolution in Appalachia?





## Step Four: Analyzing Maps for Context



Child Labor in the United States:  
Coal Mining

“Analyze a Map”  
handout from the National Archives

### Discussion:

#### Investigative Questions:

1. What was it like to be a worker in the midst of the second Industrial Revolution in Appalachia?
2. What were the regional social costs of widespread industrialization in the early twentieth century?



“Coal Creek Artifacts join Davy [David] Crockett’s Rifle at the Museum of East Tennessee History”

8 September 2017

Students from Briceville, Tennessee.  
[2017]

Image Courtesy of [Coal Creek Watershed Foundation, Inc.](#)

Full story and information can be found [here](#).

## Connecting the Local (or Regional) with the National

- Benefits
  - Making history local better engages students
  - Understand how national events impacted regular people
- How do you find those local/regional stories?
  - Look for primary sources (images, documents, maps, artifacts, oral histories/recordings) from your local archives, museums, and historical societies
  - Historical Newspapers - *Chronicling America*, *Topics in Chronicling America*, *Newspapers.com*
  - Find and analyze local historical markers or sites of significance