



Arkansas Historical Association Newsletter

VOLUME 33, No. 2

WINTER 2016

AHA Offers Student Scholarships for 2017 Conference

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The Arkansas Historical Association plans to award travel grants to a college student from each of the state's four congressional districts. The grants of up to \$300 will cover expenses of attending the 76th Annual AHA Conference in Pocahontas, April 20-22. Undergraduate or graduate students should apply with a letter stating how conference attendance would benefit them and a separate letter of support from a faculty member. Applications should be mailed to:

Student Scholarship Program
Arkansas Historical Association
416 Old Main
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Or email the application to dludlow@uark.edu with "AHA Student Scholarship" in the subject line. The deadline for all applications is February 1, 2017.

Guest Essay: *Behind the Big House: Interpreting African-American Places in Arkansas* by Jodi A. Barnes

Dr. Jodi Barnes is the station archeologist for the Arkansas Archeological Survey at the University of Arkansas, Monticello. She is currently president of Preserve Arkansas and was the project coordinator for Behind the Big House.

I arrived at the Sanders kitchen at Historic Washington State Park, mid-afternoon. Joe McGill and Jerome Bias, dressed in 19th century garb, were busy in the kitchen. McGill was peeling sweet potatoes and Bias was preparing beef for the lowcountry gumbo. There is a fire in the hearth and Sheila Ballard and Cynthia Wallace, the Historic Washington interpreters, buzzed around offering guidance as Bias negotiates the unfamiliar kitchen.

Joseph McGill, with the South Carolina based Slave Dwelling Project, and Jerome Bias, from Stagville State Historic Site in North Carolina, were in Arkansas on May 13-14 for the Behind the Big House program put on by Preserve Arkansas, a statewide nonprofit organization focused on building stronger communities by reconnecting Arkansans to their heritage and empowering people to save and rehabilitate historic places. The program, supported in part by the Arkansas Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the



Joe McGill of the Slave Dwelling Project tastes gumbo and sweet potato pone inside the Sanders Kitchen, Historic Washington State Park.

Behind the Big House cont.

Humanities, was designed to highlight the important contributions African Americans made to Arkansas's history, offer guidance for historic preservationists who seek to preserve slave dwellings, provide recommendations for museums and historic sites that interpret them, and proffer ideas for educators who teach American history. The program was modeled after the Behind the Big House program in Holly Springs, Mississippi, which was selected as one of the National Humanities Alliance's "Engaged Humanities: Model Programs for Cultivating Vibrant Local Humanities Communities." Originally organized by Preserve Marshall County and Holly Springs, Inc., it combines archeology, historic preservation, Joseph McGill's Slave Dwelling Project, and a cooking demonstration by Michael Twitty to preserve the histories and architecture of slavery. Although McGill has slept in slave dwellings in 16 states, this was his and Bias's first visit to Arkansas.

Washington, a historic town established in 1824 in southwest Arkansas, was the ideal location for the two-day workshop that included live interpretations, tours, and lectures. Historic Washington operates as a state park interpreting and restoring the town's rich history. As a town there were a series of "Big Houses" organized on house lots and residential blocks, which differs from the single "Big House" on plantations (Stewart-Abernathy 2004). Unlike plantations where one family might own 20-50 or more slaves, in towns one family more often owned a few servants or a craftsman, who slept in the big house, the kitchen, or in separate quarters (Stewart-Abernathy 2004). At Historic Washington, the Sanders urban farmstead covered a town block and would have had plenty of space for vegetable and flower gardens, a smokehouse, a woodshed, animal pens, and the kitchen buildings, where part of the workshop was held. The kitchen building served as the principal workplace for the enslaved cooks and washerwomen and as their residence. The 1850s slave census indicates that Simon Sanders owned two adult females and one infant. The number of slaves rose to four and eventually six by 1860 (Montgomery 1980).

The Sanders kitchen is a one-story, two-room, rectangular structure, with a central chimney. The original was dismantled in the 1920s. In the 1980s, Dr. Skip Stewart-Abernathy conducted archeological excavations in the yard to locate the foundation and learn more about the people who lived and worked in it. The archeological research demonstrated how the kitchen isolated the work and lives of the enslaved women and their families from the people in the Big House, but also the ways the intimate and necessary work that occurs in kitchens tied these buildings and the women who worked in them tightly to the owners (Stewart-Abernathy 2004).

I offered to help and was handed a grater to shred the sweet potatoes. I grated and grated. The kitchen got hotter and the flies started to buzz. It was a cool early summer evening, but it was easy to imagine the hot summer days when the kitchen never cooled down. Bias prepared rice in one large cast iron pot and the meat for the lowcountry beef and okra gumbo in another. He also cooked up a sweet potato pone, from one of his grandmother's recipes. As people started



Dr. Jodi Skipper and Jerome Bias stand outside the one-story Sanders Kitchen during Preserve Arkansas's Preservation Libations at Historic Washington State Park.

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Announcements and Upcoming Conferences

- On July 1, 2016, the 111-year-old Arkansas History Commission became the Arkansas State Archives. With the name change, administration of the agency moved from the Department of Parks and Tourism to the Department of Arkansas Heritage. The archive also completed a two-year redesign of its website <http://www.ark-ives.com/>.
- Jane Hooker, Archival Manager at the Arkansas State Archives, retired December 31, 2016. A veteran of the department, she spent 33 years at the Arkansas History Commission and State Archives. Earlier in her career, she worked two years at the Special Collections at the University of Arkansas and three at the *Arkansas Gazette's* archives.
- Beginning in 2017, the Historic Arkansas Museum and the Arkansas State Archives will launch a new book lecture series called *Pen to Podium: Arkansas Historical Writers' Lecture Series*. The lectures will be quarterly and will begin on January 17th with Ken Barnes presentation, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas: How Politicians, the Press, the Klan, and Religious Leaders Imagined an Enemy, 1910–1960*. Future lectures will be given by Elizabeth Hill, Brooks Blevins, and Erik Wright. For more information and to register, email events.archives@arkansas.gov or call 501-682-6900.
- The Society for the History of Medicine and the Health Professions (SHMHP) invites submissions for its 2017 Research Grant. The grant is offered annually to support research using the collections of the Historical Research Center (HRC) in the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Library. The successful applicant will receive up to \$1,500 to support their research. Proposals should be submitted by February 15, 2017. For more information, contact Tim Nutt at 501-686-6735 or tnutt@uams.edu.
- Bill Worthen, director of the Historic Arkansas Museum for over 40 years, retired at the end of 2016. An expert on the Bowie Knife, he championed Arkansas history while serving on the board of the Arkansas Historical Association, co-authoring the *Arkansas Made* book series with Swanee Bennett, and authoring two scholarly articles in the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*. The Historic Arkansas Museum Foundation created the [Bill Worthen Future of History Fund](#) in November 2015 to fund field trips and provide Arkansas children face-to-face learning experiences at the museum.



This Place Matters. Attendees in front of the Sanders Kitchen at the 2016 Behind the Big House Program. Preserve Arkansas is currently planning 2017's Behind the Big House to be held at the Lakeport Plantation in Chicot County.

Join the Arkansas Historical Association

Membership includes four issues of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* per year, as well as the Association's newsletter.

Membership Levels

- ☐ Individual, one year.....\$20
- ☐ Individual, two year.....\$35
- ☐ Family, one year.....\$30
- ☐ Family, two year.....\$45
- ☐ Foreign, one year.....\$30
- ☐ Student, one year.....\$15
- ☐ Contributing, one year.....\$50
- ☐ Sustaining, one year.....\$100
- ☐ Supporting, one year.....\$200
- ☐ Life Membership.....\$500
(payable over three years)
- ☐ Permanent Membership.....\$1000
(payable over five years)

One-Year Corporate/Business Memberships

- ☐ Sponsor.....\$100
- ☐ Patron.....\$500
- ☐ Benefactor.....\$1000

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Send this form along with payment to:

Arkansas Historical Association

History Department, Old Main 416

University of Arkansas

Fayetteville, AR 72701

Renewal and new memberships can be paid online using Paypal; visit the AHA website <http://arkansashistoricalassociation.org> and click "Membership."

Behind the Big House cont.....

to arrive for Preservation Libations, Bias talked about reading 18th-century cookbooks to prepare for his role as an enslaved cook. He also recounted the story of making sweet potato pone, a sweet potato pudding prepared with grated sweet potatoes, sugar, milk, egg, and nutmeg, for a program in North Carolina. A woman from Kenya was in attendance. She told Bias how she made a similar dish in Kenya with cassava instead of sweet potatoes. Stories like this were an important part of the program because they made connections between Africa and the New World and show how people continued cultural traditions.

That night McGill, Bias, and I slept in the Sanders Kitchen. McGill is an interpreter at Magnolia Plantation in South Carolina and a Civil War history reenactor. He travels the country sleeping in some of the darkest places in American history, the places where the enslaved once lived. The Slave Dwelling Project's mission is to identify and assist property owners, government agencies, and organizations to preserve extant slave dwellings. But as he told the attendees the next day, it also helps African Americans to identify with these places. When McGill sleeps in a slave dwelling, it sends a powerful message to its owner that people care about the place and hopefully it will inspire private owners who have these buildings on their property to pay attention to their condition. But the

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AHA Awards

Each year the Arkansas Historical Association recognizes the best teaching, writing, and scholarship in Arkansas history. For a complete list of requirements and nomination forms, visit the AHA website, arkansashistoricalassociation.org.

James H. Atkinson Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Arkansas History

For K-12 teachers; \$1,000 prize; deadline March 1, 2017.

Susannah DeBlack Award

Honors best book on Arkansas history for a young audience; \$200 prize; deadline February 1, 2017.

J. G. Ragsdale Book Award

Best book-length nonfiction study of Arkansas history published in 2015 or 2016; \$1,000 prize; deadline January 1, 2017.

Lucille Westbrook Local History Award

Best manuscript article on a local Arkansas subject; \$1,000 prize; deadline February 1, 2017.

Violet B. Gingles Award

Best manuscript on any Arkansas topic; \$500 prize; deadline February 1, 2017.

James L. Foster and Billy W. Beason Award

Best master's thesis or doctoral dissertation that addresses some aspect of Arkansas's history; \$250 prize; deadline January 1, 2017.

Tom Dillard Advocacy Award

Bestowed upon a person or organization who has demonstrated a sustained commitment to promoting the study, appreciation, preservation, and dissemination of Arkansas history; \$300 prize; deadline February 1, 2017.

Diamond Award

Recognizes exceptional contribution to the study, preservation, or promotion of Arkansas history by an institution or individual. Nominations must be made through an AHA Board member; deadline December 1, 2016.



At the 2016 Conference in Little Rock, Lifetime Achievement Awards were presented to Dr. Ruth Hawkins (l) for her contributions to historic preservation and heritage tourism and Dr. Carl Moneyhon (r) for his excellence in scholarship and public outreach.

NEARA Award

Best manuscript using primary and archival records, particularly the Lawrence County territorial papers (1815-1836), from the NorthEast Arkansas Regional Archives in Powhatan; \$1,000 prize; deadline February 1, 2017.

Walter L. Brown Awards for Arkansas County and Local Historical Journals

Deadlines February 1, 2017

- Best County or Local Journal; \$100 prize
- Best Article in a County or Local Journal; \$100 prize
- Best Biography, Autobiography or Memoir
- Best Family History
- Best Church History
- Best Community History
- Best School History
- Best Business History
- Best Edited Documents
- Best Use of Graphics
- Best Newsletter

Behind the Big House cont.....

impact of the Slave Dwelling Project expands beyond the preservation of buildings. In other places, the descendants of enslavers and the descendants of the enslaved have both slept in the dwellings, creating dialogue and starting a healing process. Sleeping in the Sanders kitchen and learning about McGill's project was a reminder of the importance of interpreting African-American places, seeing how the enslaved may have dressed, how they prepared food, and where they slept.

During the Saturday program, Bias talked about his role as a furniture maker who interprets the experience of Thomas Day, a free black cabinetmaker from North Carolina (Bias 2010) and his involvement with the African American Cultural Celebration in Raleigh. He provided some important pointers for developing living history programs that interpret the enslaved experience. He noted that in event photography, it is important not to stereotype African Americans. Photographs that portray the African-American cook as a smiling mammy figure may not draw African Americans to the programs. Instead, it's important to show African Americans as the crafts people, the cooks, the builders, and the farmers that they were. In comparison, this may seem like a small thing, but one of the problems the African American Cultural Celebration faced was getting people to the program at the time it was designated to start. Music was key. They invite a high school band to kick off the event. People don't want to miss the music, and it draws the parents and grandparents who want to see the band members perform at this important cultural event. Bias reminded attendees of the need for African-American interpreters and storytellers in state parks and historic sites.

Dr. Jodi Skipper, an assistant professor in the Center for Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, was another presenter. She researches and teaches about heritage tourism and is also actively involved with Behind the Big House in Holly Springs. This free program, which consists of tours of the slave dwellings (often led by her students), mirrors the pilgrimage of plantation homes where people buy tickets to visit the Big Houses. She talks openly about the efforts to combine the pilgrimage and the Behind the Big House programs and the difficulties that have arose. As with Blues and foodways heritage tourism, which are rooted in African-American lives and slavery, there is a reluctance to discuss this important part of history (Skipper 2016). But she demonstrated how the work of a small group of people can have powerful impacts by concluding with images of the descendants of the enslaved celebrating part of their family reunion at one of the houses.

The Behind the Big House program brought about important conversations about a difficult time in Arkansas and U.S. history. I gave a presentation on the archeology of slavery and how educators and museums might teach this topic. Dr. Jamie Brandon presented on the archeology of Historic Washington. Billy Nations and Josh Williams toured participants around Historic Washington highlighting the powerful presence and role of African Americans. This two-day program underscored the importance of African Americans visiting these sites and seeing African Americans as interpreters at them. This important collaborative project that incorporated the Arkansas Archeological Survey, the Black History Commission of Arkansas, Arkansas State Parks, and Preserve Arkansas helped put a face and an experience on the men, women, and children who lived and toiled at Historic Washington.

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President's Message



AHA President Mark Christ

First, allow me to thank you all for choosing me to serve as president of the Arkansas Historical Association. It is a signal and humbling honor to work with the state's premier history organization and its terrific Board of Trustees as we enter the AHA's fourth quarter-century.

And as we move into the AHA's 76th year, I want to challenge all of the organization's members to recruit new members and help share the study and celebration of our great state's history. At \$20 a year, to paraphrase our secretary-treasurer, AHA membership is the best bargain in history, as anyone who has ever perused an issue of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* will agree.

Renewal and new memberships can be paid online using Paypal; visit the AHA website <http://arkansashistoricalassociation.org> and click "Membership."

I also want to invite everyone to join us in Pocahontas April 20-22 for the AHA's 76th Annual Conference. This year's theme is "Great War, Great Changes" and will focus on Arkansas's participation in World War I and other moments of noteworthy change in our history. The centennial commemoration of Arkansas and the Great War begins in 2017 and this conference will be one of many events occurring during the two-year observance. Sincere thanks to the incomparable Susan Young, serving once again as chair of the annual conference committee, and

program chair Steve Kite, who has assembled a great series of presentations, as well as the many others involved in bringing this event together.

Arkansas's observance of the Great War's 100th anniversary will be coordinated through the Arkansas World War I Centennial Commemoration Committee, which Governor Asa Hutchinson created last year. You can learn more about the committee and its work at <http://www.wwiarkansas.com/>, and I urge everyone to remember the men and women who served in the war, both at home and abroad.

I am sad to report the death of AHA Trustee Claudell Woods, who passed away in September. Claudell was an accomplished attorney, a 26-year veteran of the Arkansas National Guard's legal division, and at the time of his passing the chairman of the Political Science, Geography and History Department at his alma mater, Southern Arkansas University. We will miss him and offer our sincere condolences to his family.

I think 2017 will be a great year for Arkansas history and I look forward to seeing you all in Pocahontas!

Mark Christ

President

AHA creates Dr. C. Calvin Smith Scholarship

The Arkansas Historical Association is now accepting donations to endow the Dr. C. Calvin Smith Scholarship. The scholarship will fund attendance at the annual AHA conference by a student from a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the Association's membership.

The late Dr. C. Calvin Smith was a leading figure in the study of Arkansas history—as well as a historical figure in his own right. In 1970, he was hired by Arkansas State University as a history instructor, becoming the first person of color on the faculty in that school's history. He produced groundbreaking work on World War II and black education in Arkansas and inspired countless others in their own research and teaching endeavors.

Arkansas's story needs to be told by multiple voices and by people of all different backgrounds. By taking an active role in including such voices, and making it easier for students of diverse backgrounds to attend the conference and associate with professionals in the state, we hope to keep Arkansas studies a vibrant and exciting field. Your donation is thus an investment in the future of Arkansas's history. Send contributions, marked "Smith Scholarship," to the Arkansas Historical Association, Department of History, Old Main 416, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville AR 72710.

AHA Back Page



Pocahontas will host the 76th Annual Arkansas Historical Association Conference April 20-22.

Pocahontas has been the county seat of Randolph County since 1835, when the county was created from Lawrence County. Pictured here, around 1915, during Pocahontas Merchants' Day, the town has long been the political and economic center of the county. *Photograph Courtesy Pat Carroll.*