

Tennessee Historical Commission Meeting Minutes February 21, 2026

Call to Order

Tennessee Historical Commission (THC) met at Clover Bottom Mansion, Nashville, Tennessee, at 9:00 am Central Standard Time, for its regularly scheduled meeting. The attachments referenced herein were sent to the Commission along with the agenda, prior to the meeting date.

Tennessee Historical Commission Members present: Sam Elliott, Ambassador Victor Ashe, Beth Campbell, Dr. Warren Dockter, James Kay, Jr., Loni Harris, Doris McMillan, Reggie Mudd, Dan Pomeroy, Ben Silverman, Ray Smith, Dr. Tim Smith, Beverly Robertson, Laura Todd, and Susan Williams.

Ex-Officio members present: TDEC Representative, Hobart Akin; State Archaeologist, Phil Hodge; State Librarian and Archivist, Jamie Ritter; and Gov. Lee's Representative, Tyler Sloan. Ex-officio member and State Historian, Dr. Carroll Van West, was absent.

Tennessee Historical Commission Staff Members Present: Miranda Montgomery, State Historic Preservation Officer and Interim Executive Director; Holly Barnett, Assistant Director for Federal Programs and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer; Linda Wynn, Assistant Director for State Programs; Graham Perry, Cemetery Preservation Program Director, State Historic Sites Program Coordinator, Bobby Cooley; State Historic Sites Program Coordinator, David Britton; Caty Dirksen, Outreach Coordinator; Laura Ragan, ASAlll; and Barbara Grissom, Administrative Secretary;

Members of the Public Present: No member of the public was present.

Public Comment

Outreach Coordinator, Caty Dirksen explained that the Commission had received a public inquiry via the required public records portal, followed by a written suggestion to consider establishing a formal public comment policy. Following legal counsel advice, the Commission posts a clear and updated public comment procedure for each meeting, specifying relevant dates and instructions. Chairman Elliott invited members to adopt a public comment policy if they wished. Commissioner Pomeroy expressed his gratitude for the previous day's meeting, praising its informative nature and the staff's impressive efforts. He noted that, for many years, the Commission's operations had not been well understood.

Meeting Minutes: October 10, 2025

Chairman Elliott referred to the meeting minutes of October 10, 2025 (Attachment C1). The minutes were provided prior to the meeting.

Motion

Doris McMillan moved to approve the minutes of the October 10, 2025, meeting. Ben Silverman seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carried. Yeas: Campbell, Kay, Dockter, Elliott, Harris, McMillan, Mudd, Robertson, Pomeroy, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Todd, and Williams. Abstain: Victor Ashe.

Finance Committee Report

Susan Williams, Chair of the Finance Committee, presented the financial statement for the period from July 1 to August 30, 2025, detailing both expenses and outstanding commitments (Attachment D). Mrs. Williams shared that the Finance Committee met on February 11. She explained that the committee had finally obtained information it had been seeking, and this data was now presented in a straightforward and easily understandable manner. Members received both concise and comprehensive financial reports, enabling them to review how financial resources are distributed. Williams clarified that the Commission manages two main state accounts: the 32704 accounts, which is dedicated to operations, and the 32718 account, which covers maintenance. All expenditures are assigned to one of these two accounts, as depicted in charts distributed with the meeting materials. She also emphasized that recent cuts to the state budget have affected funding. Interim Executive Director Miranda Montgomery added that, with guidance from TDEC, the Commission prepared its first-ever budget amendment request. She outlined four main requests: (1) a recurring \$1.5 million increase to the major budget fund for capital improvements such as windows and doors; (2) an additional \$750,000 for increased expenses recorded to date; (3) a \$1.3 million boost to the 32704 account specifically for the grant-in-aid program, which would result in a 10% increase to operating grants for all entities that have not seen an increase; and (4) a \$250,000 increase to the payroll budget to allow for reclassification and adjustment of certain positions, as there is currently no flexibility in this area. Lastly, she requested a general increase of \$716,000 to the operational budget to address outdated systems and other office needs that have not been updated in some time. Mrs. Montgomery concluded by noting that the Commission had just completed a budget hearing before the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee the previous week, and would soon present before the Senate State and Local Committee.

Audit Committee Report

Reggie Mudd, Chair of the Audit Committee, reported the committee convenes annually and, since the release of its report in October, there have been no additional actions. He mentioned that the committee intends to conduct its 2026 meeting virtually, using MS Teams or Zoom, before the year concludes.

Publications Report

Beverly Robertson, Chair of the Publications Committee, delivered her report. She shared that the committee held a productive meeting on February 2, during which one of the primary topics discussed was the annual history book award. The award decision was made on February 19, and the winners are co-authors Mary Ellen Sheffield and others. A press release announcing the winners has been prepared and sent to the Publications Committee for review; Mrs. Robertson asked that any committee members who have not yet reviewed the release do so promptly so it can be finalized and distributed to announce the award recipients publicly.

Mrs. Robertson also noted that the committee took time during the meeting to review the Publications Committee bylaws to clarify the committee's responsibilities and scope. While the committee typically focuses on certain tasks, they identified additional roles outlined in the bylaws that have not been fully addressed, including recognition of meritorious print, digital, and online publications. The committee plans to explore ways to implement these recognitions at their next meeting. Furthermore, the committee discussed the possibility of developing a Tennessee history curriculum for high schools, recognizing the need for more historical content in schools and expressing interest in pursuing this project through future meetings. Robertson mentioned that funding was also a topic of concern and noted that recommendations for budget increases had already been addressed in earlier sections of the meeting. She concluded by stating that the meeting was highly productive and well attended.

Historic Sites Report

Beth Campbell, Chair of the Historic Sites Committee, presented the report. (Attachment G) She provided a summary of the progress of Historic Sites by region. The Historic Sites Program Coordinator, Bobby Cooley, contributed to her report, highlighting capital projects and statewide funding impacts.

- Marble Springs: received a \$100,000 grant from the State Museum, helping offset \$737,000 reverted from the carry-forward fund while continuing to meet program goals.
- Tipton Haynes: capital project substantially completed (essentially completed the weekend of the last week).
- Battle of Nashville Monument: planned alignment with the Tennessee Wars Commission; maintenance funds will remain available if issues arise, and the change better aligns with the commission's mission and oversight of properties.

- Carter House: capital project underway and ongoing, supplemented by a previously carried threshold project; expected to be completed within a couple months of the related threshold work despite different start dates.
- Cragfont: \$8.8 million capital project kicked off.
- Castalian Springs study: \$200,000 project kicked off for foundation documents, incorporating the “mounds” site and connecting assets in the Castalian Springs area toward a long-term goal of a larger, interactive space.

Discussion also addressed the ongoing challenge of adding properties year over year and the resulting maintenance needs. It was noted that prospective sites should be evaluated for acreage and number of buildings to estimate long-term maintenance costs; as a rough planning range, a 20–50-acre site with 4–10 buildings may involve significant deferred maintenance and require an estimated \$40,000–\$50,000 in annual maintenance (excluding support from nonprofit operating partners). It was further reported that, as of this week, the full \$425,000 allocation has been obligated (with some carry-forward expected to help through year end), and that one notable recent expense referenced was an “ice farm” item totaling \$30,000.

Discussion continued concerning managing agreements with nonprofit organizations operating THC State Historic Sites and whether changes should be made to the management agreement giving the THC control over content and exhibits for the State Historic Sites. Chairman Elliott suggested the agreements be reviewed to determine legal authority on this matter. Commissioner Silverman pointed out that resulting operational issues should be considered if any change is made to existing agreements and policies of the THC. Mr. Cooley noted that, currently, the THC does not provide any funding for exhibits or build-out of museum space. He also noted that some sites have content that does not agree with historical evidence and that making a change of this nature would have a number of implications for the Historic Sites. Chairman Elliott concluded the discussion by asking that Historic Sites staff give a report at the next Historic Sites meeting on interpretive issues at the Historic Sites.

Monuments and Markers

Ray Smith, Chair of the Monuments and Markers Committee, presented the report. (Attachment H). He thanked the committee members for their hard work and commitment. The committee met as scheduled, reviewed sixteen marker submissions, and recommended all sixteen for approval.

Motion

Ray Smith motioned to accept the 16 markers recommended with minor changes that have come in since the Monuments and Markers Committee meeting. Reggie Mudd seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Yeas: Ashe, Campbell, Kay, Dockter, Elliott, Harris, McMillan, Mudd, Pomeroy, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Todd, Williams.

Tennessee Wars Commission

Laura Todd, Chairwoman of the Tennessee Wars Commission, delivered the report (Attachment I). Mrs. Todd outlined that the group would vote on projects funded by the Wars Commission Grant Fund, emphasizing that no matching funds are required. This year’s grant totals \$73,806, distributed

among four projects. Chair Elliott encouraged members to review the project summaries and invited any questions. Laura Todd also noted that Nina Scall, Director of the Tennessee Wars Program, was unable to attend, reminding members to reach out to Ms. Scall directly if they had questions. Discussion ensued regarding the Civil War Sites Fund, which differs in several ways: applicants must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, provide a 50% match from non-state sources, and place a conservation easement on the property, held by the Tennessee Historical Commission. This year's grants amount to \$2,602,273.82. Clarification was provided for board members regarding the Shy's Hill award, which preserves a significant portion of the Battle of Nashville site. Board member Jim Kay is donating part of this award to the Battle of Nashville Trust and has requested an ethics opinion from TDEC General Counsel about any potential conflicts. Mr. Kay stated he would step out for discussion and voting, underscoring the importance of the conflict of interest policy. He shared details about his longstanding involvement with the Battle of Nashville Trust—22 years of service, purchasing the property for preservation, its appraisal at \$1,550,000, an anonymous \$500,000 gift with \$50,000 waived, and the Trust's plan to acquire the property for \$1,500,000 on July 1. If the grant is approved, the Trust will be reimbursed for half the remainder after the gift in November of the following year. Kay also described his role as an officer, and his vision to protect eight acres for an interior park to preserve American history. He affirmed his actions as moral, legal, and ethical, noting he requested an ethics opinion to ensure transparency for all members.

Motion:

Laura Todd made a motion to approve the projects proposed except for the Shy's Hill acquisition. Ray Smith second. Yeas: Ashe, Campbell, Kay, Dockter, Elliott, Harris, Mudd, Pomeroy, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Williams. Abstain: McMillan, Todd.

Motion

Loni Harris made a motion to approve Shy's Hill grant subject to the ethics opinion from TDEC counsel.¹ Ray Smith seconded. Yeas: Ashe, Campbell, Kay, Dockter, Elliott, Harris, Mudd, Pomeroy, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Williams. Abstain: Ashe, McMillan. Jim Kay stepped out of the meeting for the vote.

¹ By memorandum dated March 27, 2026, TDEC confirmed the actions taken by both the THC and Commissioner Kay in connection with the award of a CWSPF grant to the Battle of Nashville Trust comply with Executive Order No. 2, THC Conflicts of Interest Statement requirements, and other applicable requirements.

Historic Cemetery Program

Graham Perry submitted his report (Attachment J) prior to the meeting for review. He provided an overview of the Historic Cemetery Program, noting an increased volume of calls and emails this quarter. The Historic Cemetery Register continues to grow; however, progress remains steady but methodical, as new listings are added individually rather than in large groups. Members have received both the current report and the five-year report, which requires a vote at today's meeting. This quarter's activities included nine site visits, many of which involved thorough assessments to determine the potential for additional unmarked areas within existing cemetery boundaries. This process allows for appropriate recommendations to be made regarding further actions. Three

cemetery conservation workshops were organized — one in each of the state's grand divisions. The Knoxville workshop was particularly well attended, drawing over 40 participants, including Jonathan Pells.

Federal Programs

Mrs. Montgomery submitted the Federal Programs Report, compiled by Holly Barnett, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer (Attachment K). She provided an update from the federal division of our agency regarding Certified Local Governments (CLGs) and the national register submission received in the last quarter of 2025. The report also includes information from the tax credit program, indicating a cumulative investment exceeding \$1.6 billion since its inception. Additionally, statistics from the Section 106 review program for the previous quarter show that a total of 646 projects were reviewed.

Merit Awards Committee

Laura Todd and Outreach Coordinator Caty Dirksen convened to discuss the potential of hosting a preservation luncheon for award recipients. Mrs. Todd noted they met in Jackson, Tennessee and engaged in a productive conversation. To streamline proceedings, commissioners received the slate of nominations prior to the meeting. This year set a record, with a total of 18 nominations submitted exclusively by the public; none originated from staff recommendations. Notably, one nominee was put forward three times, resulting in 16 distinct awards to be presented. They ask that everyone maintain confidentiality until May. Traditionally, Certificate of Merit Awards are announced during Historic Preservation Month, and this year, we aim to reinstitute the award ceremony format. The State Review Board meeting is scheduled for May 15th at 9:00 am, during which National Register nominations will be evaluated. We strongly encourage all members to attend. Following the meeting, a ceremony will be held for the Merit Award nominees with light refreshments provided. As customary, a press release will be issued, and each recipient will be featured throughout May on the THC Facebook page. Additionally, the June Courier cover story will spotlight these achievements.

Motion

Loni Harris made a motion to approve the nomination slate as a whole. Ray Smith seconded the motion. Yeas: Campbell, Kay, Dockter, Elliott, Harris, Mudd, Pomeroy, McMillan, Todd, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Williams. Abstain: Ashe.

Selection Committee

Dr. Warren Dockter, Chairman of the Selection Committee, presented his report. He expressed gratitude to all committee members for their contributions and noted that included in the distributed materials are draft copies of the job summary and description intended for advertising the position. Dr. Dockter proposed that the full commission examine the documents and submit any comments or suggested changes via email. He requested that feedback be provided by mid-March—allowing approximately 21 days for responses — so he can consolidate the input and share it with Mrs. Montgomery. A draft evaluation rubric was prepared to assess applicants consistently against the job description. Dr. Dockter requested that any further comments be submitted promptly to ensure an informed discussion moving forward. Dr. Dockter clarified that the position will be posted on the State's website but will not be limited solely to state employees; broader advertising is planned to

attract a wider range of candidates. The committee will determine a method for narrowing the applicant pool once submissions have been received. Dr. Dockter also announced that Mrs. Montgomery has expressed interest in applying for the position. Accordingly, she will recuse herself from related Search Committee deliberations moving forward. He recommended that Barbara Grissom serve as the minute-taker during this period. Mrs. Montgomery added that, following collection of all feedback, and to facilitate timely progress, the next steps will align with HR procedures once the position is advertised.

Interim Executive Director Evaluation

Executive Session

Other Business

Report from the State Archaeologist

State Archaeologist Phil Hodge presented his report. This year's free Current Research in Tennessee Archeology Conference in Nashville was postponed due to the ice storm; we are working to reschedule it and will notify attendees once details are confirmed. For 2025–2026, our Division is focused on dedicating three state parks with archaeological significance as part of the Governor's conservation strategy: Cardwell Mountain State Archaeological Park in Warren County (the system's third archaeological park), Fort Southwest Point State Historic Park in Roane County (formerly a county park), and Cherokee Trail of Tears State Park in Meigs County at Blythe Ferry. They are coordinating dedication events with Tennessee State Parks. They launched an archaeological geophysics program with new ground-penetrating radar and magnetometers, funded by State Parks. Our partnership with UT Chattanooga will extend this research underwater along the Tennessee River. Notable staff updates include Mrs. Montgomery's appointment of Jennifer Barnett to Deputy SHPO and Dr. Aaron Deter-Wolf's completion of his PhD and National Geographic feature on tattoo archaeology—he is internationally recognized in this field.

Report from the State Librarian and Archivist

State Librarian and Archivist Jamie Ritter reported updates on grant funding and Statehood Day, June 1st. He announced that the Institute for Museum and Library Services has funding secured through FY26, and the Grants to States program's annual federal allocation of \$3.6 million has increased, with two federal years available for use. Statehood Day will be observed on May 30th.

Report from the State Historian

State Historian Carl Van West was unable to attend the meeting. No report.

Legislative Report

Mrs. Montgomery reported that the full house bill passed the Senate, waiting to be scheduled in the House.

Black History Month and Preservation Month

Linda Wynn, Director of State Programs and an original co-founder, reported that the 45th Annual National Conference on African American History was successful this year.

Committee Assignments

Chairman Elliott stated that the two new members have received their committee assignments. Commissioners who wish to request a different committee placement are encouraged to inform the chairman.

June Meeting and October Meeting

Chairman Elliott informed the Commission that the June meeting will be held at Pickwick Landing State Park. The agenda will include a tour of Shiloh Battlefield and dinner at Hagy's Catfish House. The October meeting is scheduled for Oak Ridge, with arrangements being coordinated by Ray Smith. Suggested dates for the June meeting are the 23rd and 24th, due to the state holiday of Juneteenth falling on the Friday of that week.

Motion:

Victor Ashe made a motion to move the June commission meeting June 23-24, 2026 due to the State holiday of Juneteenth. Ray Smith seconded. Yeas: Ashe, Campbell, Dockter, Kay, Elliott, Harris, Pomeroy, McMillan, Mudd, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Todd, and Williams. Motion approved unanimously.

Motion:

Ray Smith made a motion to have the fall Commission meeting in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, October 22 - 23, 2026. Doris McMillan seconded. Yeas: Ashe, Campbell, Dockter, Kay, Elliott, Harris, Pomeroy, McMillan, Mudd, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Silverman, Todd, and Williams. Motion approved unanimously.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chairman Elliott thanked everyone for their time and attention.

Motion:

Loni Harris motioned to adjourn. Beth Campbell seconded. Motion passed. Yeas: Ashe, Campbell, Dockter, Kay, Elliott, Harris, Pomeroy, McMillan, Mudd, Silverman, Robertson, R. Smith, T. Smith, Todd, and Williams. Motion approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.

Submitted by:

Sam D. Elliott, Chairman
Miranda Montgomery, Interim Executive Director