



The Douglas Henry State Museum Commission (DHSMC) met at 9:45 a.m. ET on July 11, 2025, at Bryan College; Osborne Hall, in Dayton, TN with Chairman Bo Watson presiding.

Members Present

Ambassador Victor Ashe
Cathy Cate
The Honorable Steve McDaniel
Scott Price
Lottie Ryans
Laura Travis
Chairman Bo Watson
Derita Coleman Williams

Ex Officio

Anna Durham Windrow, Tennessee Historical Society Chair (absent)
Ashley Howell, TSM Executive Director

Members Absent

Danielle Barnes
The Honorable Gary Hicks
Michael Keeney
Phillip Renfro
Barbara Brown Street

Participating Guest

David Holcomb, Bryan College Vice President

Participating TSM Staff

Sabrina Hooper, Deputy Director
Sharon Dennis, DHSMC Liaison
Richard White, Chief Curator

Call to Order

Chairman Bo Watson called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m., proceeded with roll call, detected a quorum present, and presided over the following business.

Welcome and Introduction

Chairman Watson welcomed members and introduced Bryan College Vice president David Holcomb to give a brief history of Bryan College and to offer an opening prayer.

Mission Statements

In an ongoing effort to level set, Chairman Watson began by reading the Mission Statements of the Tennessee State Museum and the Douglas Henry State Museum Commission.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Watson identified the April 14, 2025, Quarterly meeting minutes draft emailed in advance of this meeting, also included in the meeting booklets, and entertained a motion to adopt the meeting minutes as written. Ambassador Ashe moved to adopt; seconded by Mr. Price. Upon calling for discussion and seeing none, the Chair called for those in favor of adoption of the April 14, 2025, Quarterly meeting minutes as written. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Budget Report

Chairman Watson recognized Deputy Director Sabrina Hooper.

Budget Report May 31, 2025

- State Appropriations: 77% of total State appropriated dollars were expended; a slight increase over this time last year.
- Pre Closing: Anticipates \$60,000 over in Operating Budget due to additional dumpsters used for clean-up at Polk, conservation needs, and an unexpected cost of \$41,000 in operational expenses for the Lorraine Motel. Carry forward funds will be used to cover this cost. A final closing budget report will be provided in October.
- The Lorraine Motel is owned by the State of Tennessee and is one of three buildings on the National Civil Rights Museum campus. On July 1, 2025, the Lorraine Motel¹ will be included as a General Services Building, operational expenses to JLL (State vendor/contractor) will be expended through the State Facilities Revolving Fund (FRF), not the TSM budget.
- TN America250 expenses are identified under Grants and Subsidies.
- DHSMC previously approved 1 million dollars to be held from the Legislative Capital Grant of 5 million dollars for 501(c)(3) museums in seven counties impacted by Hurricane Helene. A balance of \$389,000 carried forward.

HR Transactions last Quarter

Six (6) new hires, one (1) resignation.

Currently advertising for two (2) open positions out of seven (7) vacancies.

Ms. Ryans announced Deniece Thomas, Commissioner Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development has once again opened the Tennessee's Youth Employment Program for students up to age 24. This provides a unique opportunity to hire interns paid for by the Department of Labor.

Tennessee General Assembly Capital Grants FY25-26

The third 5-million-dollar Legislative appropriation opened for applications July 1 and closes August 25. The Chair requested the grant recipients damaged by Hurricane Helene to be identified in the final accounting of funding.

Executive Director's Report

Director Howell echoed thanks to Bryan College for hosting the Commission. She thanked Ms. Travis and Representative Ron for hosting the Commission as well and highlighted the scheduled tour later this day of the Historic Courthouse that houses the Rhea County Heritage and Scopes Trial Museum. Rhea County received a timely \$71,000 Capital Grant for the historic courthouse capital improvements completed prior to the Scopes 100 celebration.

Visitation

- From July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, TSM has welcomed approximately 140,000

¹ The Lorraine Motel in Memphis is owned by the State of Tennessee. The National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) is a lessee of the State of Tennessee, and the Tennessee State Museum is the lessor.

visitors which is a 2.4% increase over last year.

- TSM served approximately 36,000 in school tour numbers and 42,000 in State Capitol tours.
- In total, approximately 215,000 that includes direct contact and additional contact through web, social media and print.
- The museum served 95 counties with through K-12 initiatives this fiscal year and continues to look at service county by county in an effort to deepen relationships while nurturing a new Teacher Advisory Committee. Teacher workshops were conducted in all three Grand Divisions.
- Anchor programs continue to grow.

Military Museum and Capitol Visitor Center

Director Howell referenced in the April Quarterly meeting, previews of the new Military Museum, Capitol Visitor Center, and Gift Shop were shared.

- To date, the artifacts have been chosen, staff continues to work on the script and actual text of the exhibits, is working with the visual designers for interactive stations, along with General Services on the store, and all the spaces.
- Management is preparing the museum budget to submit in the fall which includes additional TSM staffing positions for operations in LP.

The deadline for completion is prior to the January 2027 inauguration.

Collection Storage Facility Update

- Staff members now occupy workstations in the new Collection Storage Facility.
- Artifact packing of the collection in Polk continues with over 40,000 artifacts moved to date which include firearms, furniture and paper.
- Management and staff continue to scrutinize all exhibit files, artifact files, and miscellaneous files in Polk to determine what to move to the new facility, what to move to TSLA, what to deaccession, what to shred, as well as making micro decisions in tracking from Polk to its final specific location after which it must be logged into the data base. Ultimately, it is the goal to have the entire collection online for public access; however, to date there are approximately 9,000 artifacts listed in the online data base.

Chairman Watson noted that no one except for members will appreciate the magnitude of this project.

Tennessee America250

- Director Howell, as Chairlady of the Tennessee Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial², reported hiring a state coordinator who began in May and an intern who will begin next week. State and Community Grants associated with this Commission are posted on <https://tn250.com/> and are managed by the TN America250 coordinator and her assistant. TSM social media cross-posts with TN250.com grants info.

Collections/Acquisitions Committee (CAC) Report

Chairman Watson recognized CAC Chairman Victor Ashe who began by identifying 445 “Proposed Deaccessions” beginning on page 27 in the meeting booklet emailed to the full commission in advance of this meeting and deferred to Director Howell for any object description.

Proposed Deaccessions for Disposal

Cumberland Science Museum Collection

Director Howell described the five artifact groupings within this collection of 4,815 items, of which 445 have been evaluated for deaccession. Registration Number: 2001.19, 2001.65, 2001.78, 2001.24, 2001.145 (Groupings)

Chairman Watson entertained a motion to adopt the five (5) proposed deaccession groupings. Ambassador Ashe moved to adopt deaccession of the (5) proposed deaccession groupings listed in the fully executed Deaccession Certification form for: Registration Number: 2001.19, 2001.65, 2001.78, 2001.24, 2001.145 (Groupings) Seconded by Mr. Price.

Upon calling for further discussion and seeing none, the Chair called for those in favor of the motion to adopt deaccession of the (5) proposed deaccession groupings listed in the fully executed Deaccession Certification form for: Registration Number: 2001.19, 2001.65, 2001.78, 2001.24, 2001.145 (Groupings). The motion carried unanimously with no abstentions.

Artifact /Acquisitions Report

Director Howell reflected on how staff continues to be judicious in acquiring acquisitions especially during the move. Of special note, during preparation for this move, staff discovered the following that are listed on the report as “Found.”

- Accession number 2025.14 described as “approximately 1600 items relating to author Alex Haley purchased in 2008”
- 2025.17 “Documents related to Philip Van Horn Weems from Montgomery County TN; items were discovered in accession file room and upon review were determined to be appropriate for the collection”
- This demonstrates the backlog whereby former staff put the acquisitions aside and they were never processed or tracked. They were not accessioned which explains the 2025 “found” notations in the report.

Director Howell closed by saying post move, it is her desire to digitize and share widely newfound treasures as well as all existing artifacts.

Chairman Watson expressed his desire both for academic purposes as well as public interest the creation of a narrative to tell the story of the process of how artifacts are catalogued, how artifacts are moved and how artifacts are properly stored in the new multi-million-dollar storage facility.

Red Grooms Fox Trot Carousel³ Discussion

Director Howell informed Commissioners she has completed an RFI that has now been vetted through the Attorney General’s office. Now with General Services and the Central Procurement Office, the next step will be to post the RFI which seeks a partner for the restoration, placement and operation of the Red Grooms Carousel. A Notice of Intent to Respond is included.

Nominating Committee Appointments

Calling for objection and seeing none, Chairman Watson rolled the announcement of the Nominating Committee slate to the next Quarterly meeting.

Vote Confirmation of Audit Committee (AFC) Selected by Chairman Watson

³ The Red Grooms Fox Trot Carousel was transferred to TSM whereas the museum has been custodian for over 21 years.

Chairman Watson proposed the following AFC members slate for a vote confirmation: Gary Hicks, Chair; Ambassador Victor Ashe; Danielle Barnes; Michael Keeney; Bo Watson.

Ms. Ryans moved approval of the slate of appointments by the Chair to the Audit Committee (AFC): Chairman Gary Hicks, Chair; Ambassador Victor Ashe; Danielle Barnes; Michael Keeney; Bo Watson; seconded by Mr. Price. Upon calling for further discussion and seeing none, the Chair called for those in favor of adoption of Chairman Watson's proposed Audit Committee (AFC) slate. The motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

Annual Renewal of MOU with Operating Guidelines

Memorandum of Understanding submitted by the Tennessee State Museum Foundation

An MOU between the TSMF, DHSMC and TSM, was reached in 2019. In compliance with the requirements contemplated in section IV. REQUIREMENTS⁴, the Chair noted a letter from Thomas S. Smith, Chairman of the Tennessee State Museum Foundation, formerly Chairman of the DHSMC, which outlines the Support Group's compliance with all MOU w/Guidelines requisites. The Chair noted the importance of this MOU and thanked Chairman Smith for his partnership.

Chairman Watson called for a motion to approve renewal of the MOU as originally written, signed, and submitted by the TSMF. Ambassador Ashe moved approval of the MOU as originally written, signed, and submitted by the TSMF; seconded by Mr. Price. Upon calling for further discussion and seeing none, the Chair called for those in favor of adoption of the motion which carried unanimously with no abstention.

Code of Conduct Verification Forms

Chairman Watson called for all members to complete, sign, and return this day an Annual Code of Conduct Verification Form emailed in advance and included in the meeting booklets. Ms. Dennis will call upon those not present to return their fully executed forms.

Other Business

Executive Director Performance Management Discussion

Chairman Watson informed members Director Howell submitted a self-evaluation to the Chair. Chairman Watson recommended an overall performance rating for the Executive Director of "Exceptional," explained his reasoning and called for discussion. Following discussion, the Chair moved to approve the overall performance rating of "Exceptional" for Executive Director Ashley Howell; seconded by Ambassador Ashe. The motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

Later in this meeting, to ensure absolute clarity, Chairman Watson explained the performance rating of "Exceptional" carries with it the appropriate salary increase mandated by the TN Department of Human Resources (DOHR) and moved approval of the salary increase; seconded by Ms. Ryans. The motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

Commissioner Laura Travis

Chairman Watson recognized Ms. Travis who expressed her love for the museum and her absolute devotion to the Commission for the past ten years; however, to pursue new endeavors,

⁴ REQUIREMENTS -- 2. Ensure that no more than 15% of the total non-designated revenue or funds raised by the Support Group are utilized for Support Group expenses, costs, wages, administration, and other solicitation/fundraising expenditures. The Support Group shall provide support to the Museum, defined as direct financial contributions or in-kind support as approved by the Director equal to 100% of designated funds and a minimum of 85% of the non-designated revenue or funds raised by the Support Group. The Support Group's compliance with this requirement shall be determined on an annual basis.

Ms. Travis offered her resignation from the Commission. Chairman Watson thanked Ms. Travis for sharing the story of the Tennessee State Museum giving a physical identity to the State's story, and for her service and dedication. She was recognized by members for her leadership and enthusiasm. Ambassador Ashe moved to adopt a resolution expressing appreciation for Laura Travis's distinguished years of service; seconded by Chairman Watson. The motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

Media Coverage

Chairman Watson acknowledged the Quarterly Newsletter and Media Booklet.

No Public Comment

Announcements

Regularly Scheduled Quarterly meeting dates:

October 13, 2025, January 12, 2026, April 13, 2026, July 13, 2026

The DHSMC meets the second Monday of the first Month of each Quarter. Dates are subject to change.

Patron's Party, Hermitage Hotel

Saturday, August 2, 2025

\$450 per person

A Tennessee Waltz, State Capitol

Saturday, September 27, 2025

\$800 per person

Adjournment

Seeing no other business for the good of the order, Chairman Watson entertained a motion to adjourn. Ambassador Ashe moved to adjourn, and the Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:47 a.m.

Main Motions Summary

Motion #1: Ambassador Ashe moved to adopt the April 14, 2025; Quarterly meeting minutes as written. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #2: Ambassador Ashe moved to adopt deaccession of the (5) proposed deaccession groupings listed in the fully executed Deaccession Certification form for: Registration Number: 2001.19, 2001.65, 2001.78, 2001.24, 2001.145 (Groupings). The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #3: Ms. Ryans moved approval of the slate of appointments by the Chair to the Audit Committee (AFC): Gary Hicks, Chair; Ambassador Victor Ashe; Danielle Barnes; Michael Keeney; Bo Watson. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #4: Ambassador Ashe moved approval of the MOU as originally written, signed, and submitted by the TSMF. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #5: Chairman Watson moved to approve the overall performance rating of "Exceptional" for Executive Director Ashley Howell. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #6: Chairman Watson explained the overall performance rating of "Exceptional" carries with it the appropriate salary increase mandated by the TN Department of Human Resources (DOHR) and moved approval of the salary increase. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #7: Ambassador Ashe moved to adopt a resolution expressing appreciation for Laura Travis's distinguished years of service. The motion carried unanimously with no abstention.

Motion #8: Ambassador Ashe moved to adjourn.

Senator Bo Watson

Chairman Douglas Henry State Museum Commission