

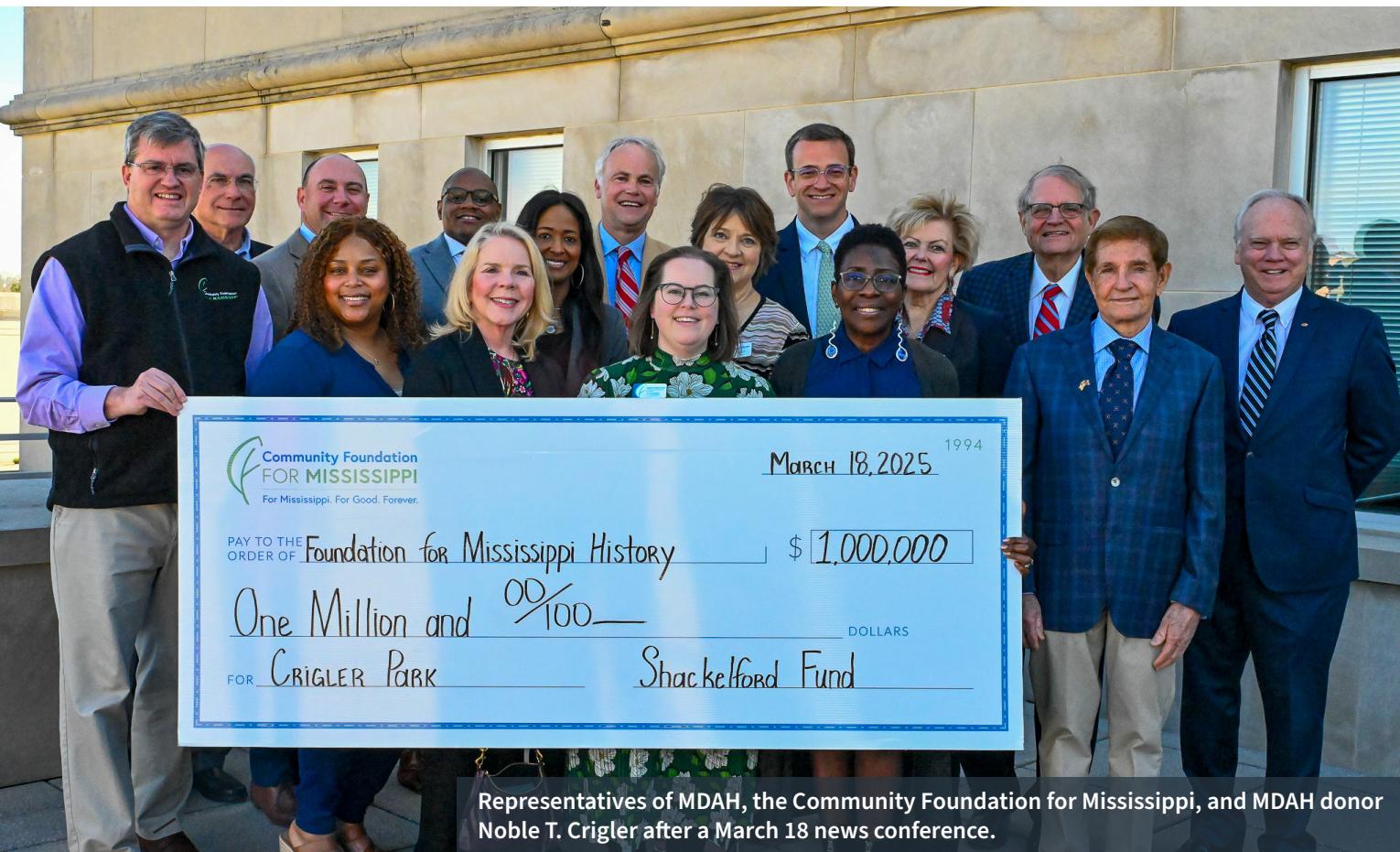
MISSISSIPPI HISTORY NEWSLETTER

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Message from the Director

Robert Benson retired June 30 after more than thirty years in state government and more than twenty here at MDAH. For the past ten years, Robert served as deputy director, collaborating with me on all aspects of our work at MDAH. His accomplishments here are significant.

He was instrumental in securing funding for the most ambitious initiatives in the department's history, including the Community Heritage Preservation Grant Program, the Two Mississippi Museums, and ongoing projects in Natchez, Vicksburg, and Jackson.



Robert transformed the agency's financial landscape, displaying creativity in identifying funding sources while rigorously adhering to state budget regulations, and developing strategies for raising, investing, and spending private funds.

With his strong organizational mind and intuition about people, Robert elevated the department's human resources operation, resulting in the largest, most diverse, and most effective staff in the department's history.



Robert played a key role in developing innovative and highly successful programs such as the Mississippi Makers Fest, the William and Elise Winter Education Endowment, and the MDAH Leadership Institute.

Robert's final significant contribution was to recruit, hire, and train his successor, Tommy Goodwin, who has already proven to be an effective leader in his new role.

Robert and I led the department together for ten years. We share a passion for this agency that we both credit to the example of William Winter and Elbert Hilliard, who were important influences on us as on so many others. With his vision, financial acumen, and gift for leadership, Robert made a tremendous difference at MDAH. He leaves this agency far better than he found it.

Katie Blount
Director
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

The Community Foundation for Mississippi Gives \$1 Million to Crigler Park

The Community Foundation for Mississippi's \$1 million grant to Margaret Ann Crigler Park moves forward the effort to create a new green space in downtown Jackson.

Jane Alexander, president and CEO of the Community Foundation for Mississippi, said the gift to the park was made from the organization's John and Lucy Shackelford Fund, which supports projects that enhance the quality of life in the capital city.

Located adjacent to the Two Mississippi Museums, the park will feature native Mississippi foliage, a large open green space, an outdoor stage, and a play area for children. The park will be a new anchor on the city's Museum Trail.

"When we began work on this project, we knew that to be successful, we would need the support of a broad range of partners from the public, private and philanthropic communities," said Katie Blount, MDAH director. "Support from the Shackelford Fund elevated our fundraising efforts when we built the Two Mississippi Museums, and we are proud to continue our partnership with the Community Foundation."

Alexander noted that this gift extends investments in downtown Jackson made through the Shackelford Fund at CFM and will soon connect them.

"This public park will provide visitors to the Two Mississippi Museums a place to reflect on what they've experienced, and a serene space to enjoy nature," Alexander said. "We also believe this gift gives 'legs,' if you will, to the gift we made to the Two Mississippi Museums in 2017 and further connects this site to the Museum Trail—another project the Shackelford Fund has supported."

In 2024, MDAH acquired the former Eudora Welty Library property with plans to replace the building with a new public park and green space. The plans for the project align with the original layout for Jackson from 1822, which included public green spaces on alternating blocks. Only two parks remain from the original layout: the Old Capitol Green and Smith Park.

The first \$1 million for the project was donated by retired businessman Noble T. Crigler, and the park will be named after his late wife, Margaret Ann Crigler. The Mississippi Legislature has provided \$3 million for the project.



Noble T. Crigler, who donated the first \$1 million for the park named for his late wife, stands beside a rendering.



Community partners and Two Mississippi Museums Director Michael Morris look at Crigler Park renderings.

New Upgrades and Signage Await Visitors at Windsor Ruins

This summer, visitors to Windsor Ruins in Claiborne County will see upgrades at the site of the historic plantation, where only Corinthian columns now stand.

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History has completed a preservation and stabilization project that includes a walking trail and new signs that tell the stories of the plantation owners and the people who were enslaved there.

Windsor Ruins, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is a Mississippi Landmark that annually draws visitors from across the world to see the twenty-three full and five partial columns. The stabilization project has helped to preserve this site's structure and history, providing a larger narrative to be shared with future generations.

Windsor, completed in 1861, was designed by David Shroder of Maryland and built by White artisans and carpenters, and enslaved laborers. The mansion was at the heart of an extensive cotton plantation of 2,500 acres, with a workforce of over 300 enslaved people.

Near Windsor is where Union soldiers landed in 1863 to begin their ultimately successful overland campaign to take Vicksburg and control the entire Mississippi River. At least seventeen men who had been enslaved at the site joined companies of the United States Colored Troops.



The mansion burned in 1890, leaving only twenty-seven of its original twenty-nine columns, the balustrade, and four iron staircases—three that disappeared in the years after the fire and one set that now serves as the entrance to Oakland Memorial Chapel at Alcorn State University. By 1970, only twenty-three columns remained.

In 1974, MDAH began its oversight of Windsor after its donation by the Magruder family. While the columns remained in stable condition for many years, tropical storm winds, moisture, and other damage required professional conservation efforts.

Program Highlights



At a reception for the *Hurricane Katrina: Mississippi Remembers, Photographs by Melody Golding* exhibit, representatives of HORNE, the exhibit's title sponsor, pose with MDAH staff and former governor Haley Barbour.



SNCC veteran Bob Smith speaks during a workshop exploring the role of Black Power in the Civil Rights Movement at the Two Mississippi Museums.



Twurt Chamberlain performs during *History Happy Hour* at the Two Mississippi Museums. The event was sponsored by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi.



Jan Rasch, Andy Taggart, Mark Garriga, and Lisa Ireland discuss the legacy of former Mississippi governor Kirk Fordice during *History Is Lunch*.



Campers learn archery on the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians lawn during Discovery Week Camp.



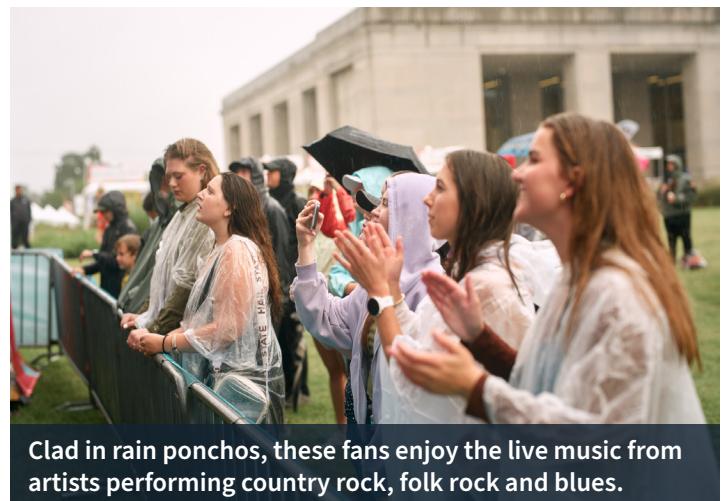
The Eudora Welty House & Garden staff received forty-two handmade birthday cards from students of teacher Dawn Moody of George County Middle School.

Makers Fest Rocks Through the Rain Thanks to Title Sponsor Nissan and a Host of Other Sponsors

Nissan and all our sponsors made the 2025 Mississippi Makers Fest a blast. Some 1,000 visitors gathered at the Two Mississippi Museums for a free day of local art, food, and live music provided by country rock artist Colin Stough, American folk rock band HAPPY LANDING, blues artist Jamell Richardson, and bluegrass band The BTJ Trio. Rain or shine, the event's sponsors make the celebration of Mississippi's diverse artistic and cultural traditions possible each year. Along with Nissan, other sponsors were AT&T, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi, Capital City Beverages, Cathead Distillery, Clark Beverage Group, Inc., Lucid Ink, Mississippi Arts Commission/National Endowment for the Arts, Mississippi Tent & Party Rental, Nancy and Ray Neilson, StateStreet Group, Visit Jackson, Visit Mississippi and 93.5 The Legend and Your Hometown Country US96 Radio Stations.



Folk rock band HAPPY LANDING dazzles the Makers Fest crowd with songs, featuring a fiddle and guitars.



Clad in rain ponchos, these fans enjoy the live music from artists performing country rock, folk rock and blues.

Author Jesmyn Ward Gives Annual Bettye Jolly Lecture at the Welty House

Author Jesmyn Ward, two-time National Book Award winner, delivered the eighth annual Bettye Jolly Lecture at the Eudora Welty House & Garden on April 25. During her conversation with the audience, Ward discussed her experiences growing up in DeLisle, the Mississippi Gulf Coast town that continues to influence her writing as shown in her latest novel, *Let Us Descend*.

"I'm grateful for the educational opportunities that I have received," Ward said. "But I am also grateful for the people in my life like my grandmother and so many others that have taught me so much."

The endowed lecture honors the late Bettye Jolly, a longtime volunteer and supporter of the Eudora Welty House & Garden. The lecture was founded by a book group formed after a seminar taught by Suzanne Marrs at Millsaps College.



Award-winning author Jesmyn Ward and Kaylee Warren, MDAH garden projects specialist, sit on Eudora Welty House & Garden side porch after Ward's Bettye Jolly Lecture presentation.



From the Archives

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the 1965 Voter Registration Act. This image shows federal examiner C.A. Phillips administering the voter registration oath to Joe Ella Moore on August 25, 1965 at the Magnolia Motel in Prentiss.

From the Moncrief Photograph Collection

From the Digital Archives

This label is from Series 4 of the Randy Randazzo Seafood Label Collection in the MDAH archives. The series consists of 174 can labels and one letterhead related to the Mississippi Gulf Coast seafood industry that packaged seafood and other products for resale throughout the United States.



From the Collection

MDAH Historic Preservation staff annotated this National Register historic district map during the damage assessment survey conducted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The mapped area is the Beach Boulevard Historic District in Bay St. Louis—one of Mississippi's largest historic districts when Katrina struck in 2005. The MDAH team marked each "X" on the map as they walked the district to document buildings completely destroyed. Yellow highlighted areas indicated properties that were intact enough to be photographed and receive a damage assessment. See this article in its entirety on display in the temporary exhibit, *Hurricane Katrina: Mississippi Remembers, Photographs by Melody Golding*, at the Two Mississippi Museums.

From the MDAH Historic Preservation Division Collection

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Department of Archives and History
Katie Blount, director

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In Memoriam

Representative Robert George Clark Jr., 1928–2025, was the first African American elected to the Mississippi Legislature since Reconstruction, serving from 1967 to 2003 and rising to the rank of Speaker Pro Tempore in the Mississippi House.

Worth Long, 1936–2025, was an organizer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who later became a renowned folklorist instrumental in the creation of The Mississippi Folklife Project.

Elizabeth Payne, 1943–2025, was a summer lobbyist for the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a renowned scholar in American women's history, founding director of the University of Mississippi's Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, and a former board member of the Mississippi Historical Society.

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Mark Your Calendar

Hurricane Katrina: Mississippi Remembers, Photographs by Melody Golding Through November 7

The free exhibit tells the story of Mississippians' resilience in the aftermath of the catastrophic storm through photographs by Melody Golding, a photographer, author, and artist from Vicksburg. The exhibit also features MDAH artifacts. HORNE is the title sponsor of the exhibit.

Summer Music Series Sunday, July 6, 2 p.m.

Violinist Andrew Dillon will perform in the Hall of History at the Two Mississippi Museums as part of the Summer Music Series.

History Happy Hour: Voting Thursday, July 17, 5 p.m.

The event, sponsored by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi, will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with live music and trivia at the Two Mississippi Museums.