



EAST TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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East Tennessee Historical Society Honors Multiple McMinn County Initiatives with Award of Excellence in History

KNOXVILLE, Tenn., May 24, 2019 – The East Tennessee Historical Society’s (ETHS) annual Awards of Excellence were presented at the organization’s Annual Meeting on May 14, 2019, at the Foundry on the World’s Fair Site in Knoxville. Since 1982, the Society has annually recognized individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the preservation, promotion, programming, and interpretation of the region’s history. Six McMinn County initiatives were among the 44 awards presented.

- **William L. “Bill” Bigham** was the recipient of the *Lifetime Achievement in History Award*. Bill Bigham has exhibited a lifelong dedication to the promotion, preservation, and interpretation of McMinn County history. At 80 years, he remains an active member of the McMinn County Historical Society and Archives, where he has served in various officer positions. He has also written and co-authored several books about McMinn County and regional history. In addition to this and his work as a genealogist, the McMinn County Historical Society and Archives named the annual William L. “Bill” Bigham Award in his honor.
- **Janet “Rae” Miller Cantrell** received a *Teaching Excellence Award*. Over the past two years, Rae has spent more than 100 hours in classrooms from Oklahoma to Tennessee promoting historical writing and the writing process. Whether fiction or genealogy articles, her work has received several awards. The Oklahoma native retired to Athens, Tennessee, in 2014, where she continues her educational pursuits through presentations to groups in Southeast Tennessee.
- **Brian Kyle** was also the recipient of a *Teaching Excellence Award*. Tennessee history and life lessons go hand-in-hand in Brian Kyle’s McMinn County High School classroom. He encourages a positive attitude and strong work ethic among his students and makes learning enjoyable, relatable, and meaningful by tying national milestones and events to local history.
- **Virginia Key and Terry Bacon** were awarded an *Award of Distinction* for undertaking the housing, cataloging, preservation, and presentation of the “Joyce Gaston Reece Collection” donated to the McMinn County Historical Society and Archives. The monumental task took approximately 720 hours. With documents, handwritten notebooks, books, rolls of

microfilm, and pictures, the collection spans from the colonial era to modern times and contains artifacts and documents relating to East Tennessee and North Carolina.

- **Dennis C. Stewart** was the recipient of an ***Award of Distinction*** for *The Desecration of Eliza Leonard*, a book that tells the story of Dr. John Leonard and Eliza Leonard and their lives and love before and after the Civil War in Monroe County. The book not only tells this unique story but also serves as a reminder that there are endangered cemetery sites throughout East Tennessee.
- **Robin & Joy Montgomery** received an ***Award or Distinction*** for their book *Sam Houston's Quest: The Cherokee & African-American Virtue Agenda*, which presents a new interpretation of Sam Houston's life in East Tennessee and his relationship with the Cherokee. Through primary sources from various archives, the book weaves together Sam Houston's story with those of others of his time

About the East Tennessee Historical Society:

Established in 1834, the East Tennessee Historical Society has 2,000 members across the United States. The Society sponsors the Museum of East Tennessee History, East Tennessee National History Day, and the family heritage programs "First Families of Tennessee" and "Civil War Families of Tennessee." Its active publications program includes the biannual genealogy magazine *Tennessee Ancestors*; the annual *Journal of East Tennessee History*; and *Newsline*, as well as other books pertaining to the region's history. For more information on ETHS, exhibitions, or programs, call 865-215-8824 or visit the website at www.EastTNHistory.org.

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