

Newsline

The Newsletter of the East Tennessee Historical Society



FROM THE PRESIDENT

2023 was a great year for firsts at ETHS. We launched our new preschool program, *Little History Lessons*, started a new annual fundraiser, *Biscuits and Bubbly*, and orchestrated the *Downtown Home Tour* (previously operated by City People). In the realm of public programming, we kicked off *Football Fridays*, a new evening event where UT history makers Todd Kelly, Jr and Lester McClain spoke about their experiences as members of the University of Tennessee football program. 2023 also saw the completion of the second season of *Appalachia Sessions*. ETHS will continue our traditional programs, including *Brown Bag Lectures*, and our signature events, *History Hootenanny* and *Monsters at the Museum*, in 2024. We are excited to have built new partnerships in 2023 to bring fresh stories and perspectives to the history of the region.



2023 was also a great year for awards! ETHS won four awards at the Tennessee Association of Museums conference, as well as giving many awards to inspiring projects from around the region during the annual *Awards of Excellence*. ETHS presented the *Spirit of East Tennessee Award* to Dino Cartwright at *Biscuits and Bubbly* and honored UT Men's Basketball Coach Rick Barnes as the *East Tennessean of the Year*.

We are excited to continue our good work in 2024. By the time you read this, our new website will be launched, making the Museum and our resources more accessible than ever. In addition to the new programs started in 2023, we will be adding *Everyday Arts*, an event that highlights the beauty and craftsmanship in ordinary items. We will also be hosting two historical symposia. To mark the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings, ETHS will host internationally renowned experts to discuss the Second World War. Another symposium will mark the anniversary of the Battle of Fort Sanders with discussions about the Civil War.

2024 is shaping up to be another excellent year for ETHS! We look forward to sharing it with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to A. Warren Dockter, PhD.

A. Warren Dockter, PhD
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THEY SANG WHAT THEY LIVED

New exhibition chronicles the lives and careers of two country music stars from Knoxville

Carl Robert Butler (1924-1992) and Pearl Dee Jones Butler (1927-1988) emerged from the vibrant tapestry of local country music to become one of the nation's most beloved and enduring country music couples during the 1960s and 1970s. Hailing from working-class neighborhoods in North Knoxville, their journey was not only one of musical trials and triumphs but also a testament to the strength of their personal and professional partnership.

Carl's early exposure to country music icons Jimmie Rodgers and Roy Acuff and local legends, such as Willie G. Brewster, "Pudgy" Douglas, "Bliss" Gibson, and "Shorty" Sams, laid the foundation for his future in country music. His proficiency with the guitar and his distinctive, open-throated vocal stylings earned Carl a spot on local radio, beginning with the Rocky Mountain Boys on Knoxville's WROL-Radio.

Pearl brought her own unique set of talents to the duo. Raised in a musical family, Pearl developed a passion for singing from a young age. Her harmonious voice and ability to connect emotionally with audiences complemented Carl's style, creating a synergy that eventually defined their musical legacy.

"I've worked in restaurants, grocery stores, and I've done everything I've known to do to keep Carl in the business. When he was starting out he'd come home many a time and he'd say, 'I've quit,' and I'd say, 'Well, the day you quit is the day that I leave you.'"

–Pearl recalling her support of Carl throughout the years

The couple, who likely first met at Stair Technical High School in Knoxville, married in 1947, and they embarked on their musical journey in the post-World War II era, navigating the evolving landscape of local radio and country music, Carl



singing in various groups, Pearl working at one of Cas Walker's grocery stores to make ends meet.

Two years after recovering from a near-death car wreck, Carl signed his first record label, cutting sides for Columbia on November 1, 1950, at WROL's studio in the Hamilton National Bank Building (present Holston Building) on Gay Street. With Carl's fame on the rise, he kept a hectic tour schedule, traveling more than 100,000 miles per year with an ever-rotating crew of band members. At times, Pearl accompanied Carl, but more often, she was at home in Knoxville.

In 1957, the Butlers moved to Nashville in search of a fresh start and new opportunities. "The good lookin' boy from over East Tennessee way" quickly found a spot on the *Grand Ole Opry*, but it would not be until February 1962, when Carl and Pearl, the duo, was formed. On the eve of their wedding anniversary, they recorded "Don't Let Me Cross Over." Pearl thought it was a demo; Carl knew it was a hit. The song went to No. 1 in just four weeks, where it remained for 11 non-consecutive

weeks, not only showcasing their musical prowess but also laying the foundation for a string of successful singles and albums that solidified their place in country music history. The Butlers' instant fame fueled an endless succession of live performances—every barn dance, grocery store opening, park dedication, church social, you name it. For the right





price, Carl and Pearl would come play in your town—together. In fact, the Butlers became ambassadors for enduring love in the public eye. Their commitment to each other through the highs and lows of life—and especially in an industry known for its challenges—served as an inspiration to fans and fellow musicians alike.

By the 1980s, country music had become “country pop,” a trend that the Butlers did not embrace, choosing to remain true to that early, open-throated “Knoxville sound.” The Butlers slowly slipped out of fashion, but their influence extended beyond their own fame. Carl and Pearl were known for their generosity and support of emerging artists, such as Dolly Parton, June Webb, and Margie Bowes. The Butlers were also known for their storytelling, which inspired subsequent generations of musicians who, at times, covered their hits; Ricky Skaggs, as an example, revived Carl’s 1960 tune “Crying My Heart Out Over You,” taking it to No. 1 on the country music charts in 1981. And, perhaps most endearingly, the Butlers were known for their hospitality, especially at their estate, Crossover Acres, in Franklin, which helped foster a sense of community among fellow performers and fans, leaving a legacy that reached far beyond their own discography.

Pearl passed away first; Carl followed four short years later. Allen “Junior” Butler, Carl’s younger brother, instinctively preserved as much as he could from Carl and Pearl’s storied career— newspaper clippings, photographs, home movies, recordings, and keepsakes, much of which had been left

behind, stuffed into large trunks. Thanks to the generosity of the Junior Butler Family and the efforts of media archivist Bradley Reeves, these materials are presented for public view for the first time in the Museum of East Tennessee History’s feature exhibition, *They Sang What They Lived: The Story of Carl and Pearl Butler*. You are invited to come experience a story which reminds us that in the heart of a song, the essence of a partnership, and the spirit of country music, the Butlers left a legacy that continues to resonate with audiences today.

They Sang What They Lived is open through August 18, 2024, and is sponsored by the **Clayton Foundation** with support from the **Downtown Knoxville Alliance**. Admission to the Museum is free for ETHS Members.

-Adam Alfrey



EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMING PARTNERS

2023 has been an exciting year for the East Tennessee Historical Society's (ETHS) K-12 education and teacher programs, as well as our incredible public programs. *Newsline* articles cover a number of these successful events and initiatives. Without support from ETHS members, donors, and event sponsors and grantors, we would not be able to fulfill our mission to interpret East Tennessee's history. As we begin a new year, it is important to reflect on and thank some who have supported our programming efforts.

ETHS is committed to providing high-quality, interactive, and evidence-based student programs. A second \$50,000 **Arts and Culture Alliance American Rescue Plan Renewal Grant** allows the continued evaluation and growth of these programs. The Arts and Culture Alliance manages this grant program on behalf of Knox County and the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Funds support the operation of ETHS's education department in its efforts to combat the impact of lost instructional time for K-12 students across East Tennessee using evidence-based programs and services. ETHS is especially proud of the work we do with Knox County teachers and students, particularly those who qualify for Title I funds. Also, to benefit Title I schools throughout the region, a grant for \$25,000 was received from the **First Horizon Foundation**, which provides free museum admission for students.

We are proud of the relationships we have built with teachers who have attended our teacher development opportunities over the years and look forward to the work we will do together in the future. A huge thank you to **Humanities Tennessee** for their sponsorship of teacher workshops and institutes since 1998! We have partnered with **Teaching with Primary Sources at Middle Tennessee State University (TPS MTSU)** for over a dozen years, subcontracting to host their valuable teacher workshops. Going forward, our partnerships will operate through TPS regional grants, like the one currently awarded directly to ETHS for a curriculum development and training initiative with Knox County Schools. TPS MTSU is the key instructional and resource partner on this project, which will lead to a much larger grant proposal in 2024.

In support of our public programs, including 2023's History Hootenanny and Monsters at the Museum, **The Downtown Knoxville Alliance (DKA)** awarded ETHS a \$5,000 sponsorship. DKA ensures a vibrant and flourishing downtown Knoxville, where the East Tennessee History Center is proudly located. ETHS has received an award totaling \$10,000 for 2024, and we are excited about and thankful for what DKA's support will allow us to accomplish.



In honor of their 50th anniversary, **ORNL Federal Credit Union** recognized regional organizations who applied for a special grant program underwritten to support the operations of organizations making a difference in the region. ETHS was honored to be awarded one of the five \$25,000 grants.

Finally, we want to say a big thank you to the **Albers Family Foundation** for their continued support of ETHS Brown Bags and lectures. The Foundation's partnership throughout the pandemic allowed us to continue our programming virtually, returning in 2021 to in person with a virtual attendance option.

2024 brings new partnership and sponsorship opportunities. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Lisa Oakley, oakley@eastTNhistory.org, or Gay Lyons, lyons@eastTNhistory.org. We welcome the conversation.

-Lisa Oakley

INTERN SHARES BENEFITS OF EXPERIENCE AT ETHS

Sequoia Conkling, UT Student, Class of 2025

As a student who is interested in a career in the museum field, it can be hard to find opportunities to learn what these types of jobs look like. This is why I was excited to learn about an internship opportunity with the East Tennessee Historical Society. This internship has not only opened my eyes to what kinds of jobs are available to history majors, but also what these jobs might entail.

Since deciding on pursuing a career in Public History, I have known that wherever I end up I want to help not only educate kids about history, but also show them that it can be fun and exciting. With this internship, I have gotten to experience ways to do this. Through working with Dani Manley Hood, the Education Program Manager, I have seen firsthand the different ways an institution such as this engages with children. From school groups, Little History Lessons, Museum events, and much more, I have been able to gain valuable knowledge in what a job in Museum Education would look like. I loved getting to watch students engage with history and get excited about what they are learning. In addition, I have been able to witness a small portion of what it takes to keep this type of museum going from an administrative perspective.

This internship has also strengthened both my research and writing skills. Through creating Gallery Carts, I have been able to learn how to take a topic I enjoy and present

it in such a way that would be educational and also interesting to the public. In addition, while helping plan Little History Lessons, I saw firsthand how challenging it can be to craft a lesson that children will understand and also learn from. I have never had to write about a historical topic for children before, so this challenged me to think about how a child might interpret certain historical events.

I am so grateful for my time at the East Tennessee Historical Society, as it has given me a glimpse into what a job in the museum field would look like. It cemented my belief that working in Museum Education is what I want to do and showed me how I might go about attaining this goal. Finally, it taught me some valuable skills that I will be able to take with me in the future.

-Sequoia Conkling



2023 BY THE NUMBERS



4,692
STUDENTS
SERVED



76
EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES
(OUTREACH & FIELD TRIPS)



14
COUNTIES
SERVED
(ACROSS TWO STATES)

2023 BY THE NUMBERS



50,046

TOTAL OUTREACH & VISITATION

20,248
VISITATION TO
THE MUSEUM



GUESTS FROM

68
COUNTRIES



91
PROGRAMS
& EVENTS



1,592
MEMBERS



5,518
CHILDREN ATTENDED
APPALACHIA
SESSIONS



142

OBJECTS WERE ADDED
TO THE COLLECTION

VIEW A LIST OF DONORS AND
ACQUISITIONS AT

[HTTPS://EASTTNHISTORY.ORG/NEW-TO-THE-COLLECTION-IN-2023/](https://easttnhistory.org/new-to-the-collection-in-2023/)

ARTIFACT HIGHLIGHTS



REUBEN LOUIS CATES' POCKET WATCH

ETHS had another donation this year that grew the Cates Collection. A Patek, Philippe & Cie Geneve pocket watch that belonged to Reuben Louis Cates, the son of Dr. John W. Cates. The 18K gold watch is engraved with the date "1906." Accompanied by a velvet case with a A. E. McCulloch Jewelers and Optometrist store label from Maryville, Tennessee.

Reuben Louis Cates received his undergraduate degree from Maryville College and graduated with honors from Yale Law School in 1892. From 1902 to 1910, he was the Knox County Attorney General. His father, Dr. John W. Cates, was also educated at Maryville College. He was taught under Dr. Isaac Anderson and graduated in 1851.

Anonymous Donation, 2023.33.1

BRUCE LESLIE'S VIEW CAMERA

A collection of materials related to the photographer Bruce G. Leslie was donated this year. The collection included one Century Studios camera and table top owned by Leslie, as well as other advertisement materials.

Leslie was a photographer who played a major role in helping to establish Great Smoky Mountains National Park, along with other photographers like Jim Thompson. Leslie had multiple studios in the Knoxville area, and the family believes that this camera was used at many of those studios.

Gift of Les Williams, 2023.31.1



EAST TN PIECED QUILT, BLAZING STAR PATTERN, CIRCA 1880

This Blazing Star Pattern quilt was made in Roane County hand-pieced by America Waller Goodwin (1835-1893), rendered with all cotton fabric. It consists of 14 1/2 blocks set 4 x 4, separated by 5 1/2" sashing with 8-point star corner blocks and no outer borders. The full measurement of this quilt is 73" wide and 81" long.

2023.32.4

Photos courtesy of Case Antiques

-Rebecca P'Simer

ALLEGORY OF CHATTANOOGA



The historic mural on the wall behind the judge's bench in the third-floor courtroom of the U.S. District Court in Chattanooga has been seen by lawyers, jurors, spectators, and the public for decades. It was installed in 1936, but it gained renewed interest in 2010, seventy-four years later, by mere happenstance.

U.S. District Judge Harry S. Mattice, Jr, now retired, was told by a friend that a painting strikingly similar to the mural was being advertised for sale on eBay, a puzzling development, for sure. So, he asked Don K. Ferguson, then Executive Director of the U.S. District Court Historical Society, to look into the matter, with the thought that the court or the Society might wish to purchase the painting.

My subject does not confine itself to any one event or place, but rather tries to portray a few highlights in history as they have happened in the state of Tennessee and around Chattanooga in particular.

Using Chattanooga's famous Lookout Mountain as my background, I tried to weave together in front of it a frieze of figures, singly and in groups, each a symbol of the life of that part of our country.

- Hilton Leech, upon submitting his work

The mural and the painting were created by 30-year-old artist Hilton Leech under a contract with the U.S. Treasury Department, which supervised the construction of federal buildings in the 1930s. In his award-winning bid, he submitted two mural studies, or samples, to Washington officials for review.

Ferguson learned that after completion of the mural project, the studies were returned to Leech and remained in his collection until his death in 1969 and then with his widow until her death in 2001. Their daughter inherited the collection, and in 2009, she arranged to have an art dealer sell the paintings. It was this dealer who placed the studies on eBay and from whom the court, working through the Court Historical Society, purchased one of the studies. The price: \$2,250. The dealer provided an "Authenticity Letter" vouching for its origin. The study measures 20" by 68 3/4".

The court had the study framed and hung it in a first-floor courtroom of the federal courthouse in Chattanooga, a courtroom where today U.S. District Judge Charles E. Atchley, Jr presides. Judge Atchley is a member of the Board of Directors of the East Tennessee Historical Society.

-Don K. Ferguson

Don K. Ferguson is the former Executive Director of the Historical Society of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee, which merged with ETHS in March 2023.



EAST TENNESSEAN OF THE YEAR



RICK BARNES HONORED AS EAST TENNESSEAN OF THE YEAR

A sellout crowd attended the East Tennessean of the Year on November 1, 2023, at Cherokee Country Club. This year, the annual black-tie event honored University of Tennessee Men's Basketball Coach Rick Barnes. The Board of Directors of the East Tennessee Historical Society established the East Tennessean of the Year award to honor an East Tennessee history maker who is an ambassador for the region and represents integrity, dignity, leadership, and the volunteer spirit. The event is the East Tennessee Historical Society's largest fundraiser. Thanks to our presenting sponsors: **Pilot Corporation, Tennessee Valley Authority, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and H.T. Hackney.**

-Dr. Gay Henry Lyons



PROGRAMS & EVENTS

HISTORY HOOTENANNY CELEBRATES FILM IN EAST TENNESSEE



In August, the East Tennessee History Center welcomed over 850 guests to *History Hootenanny*, the annual open house celebration of East Tennessee history. This year ETHS partnered with the Knox County Public Library's Clarence Brown Film Festival and showcased the feature exhibition *Lights! Camera! East Tennessee!* The film theme was carried throughout the event with children's activities, walking tours, and more. Guests enjoyed free admission to the Museum of East Tennessee History, live music, a used local history book sale, shuttles to the Historic House Museums of Knoxville, and booths from local historical and genealogical organizations. A special thank you to the **Downtown Knoxville Alliance**, **US Bank**, and **John Trotter** for sponsoring this event.

-Kelley Weatherley-Sinclair



ETHS LAUNCHES FOOTBALL FRIDAYS

In September and October, the East Tennessee Historical Society took history to the streets with this new public program. Around 350 guests enjoyed two Friday night pep rallies on Market Street, which included a visit from Smokey's Spirit Squad, live music by West Wend, delicious food from local food trucks, and beverages served by Knox Taps. Guests also enjoyed appearances by two UT history makers, Todd Kelly, Jr and Lester McClain, who shared their experiences during their time in the University of Tennessee football program. Thanks to our generous sponsors **Downtown Knoxville Alliance**, **Schulz Brau Brewing**, **Bacon and Co.**, and **Knox Taps**.

-Kelley Weatherley-Sinclair



APPALACHIA SESSIONS: SEASON 2

This autumn was an exciting one for *Appalachia Sessions*. We continue to educate, inspire, and connect the students of East Tennessee at museums and concerts! There were two live concerts held at Lincoln Memorial University's (LMU) B. Frank "Tex" Turner Arena, which drew over 3,500 students from Claiborne and surrounding counties. This season's partnership with LMU also allowed all the students to tour the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum in Harrogate. In addition, 21 scholarships were awarded to selected students who were able to join the audience. The rest of the season's concerts were at the historic Point venue in Knoxville and featured amazing artists like Ketch Secor from Old Crow Medicine Show, Molly Tuttle, Suzy Bogguss, and Stella Prince. The students who attended the Knoxville shows visited the Museum of East Tennessee History or partner museums, including Blount Mansion, the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, and the Knoxville Museum of Art. In all, this season saw middle and high school students from 12 counties in East Tennessee. The concert portion of the programs also resulted in the creation of several half-hour episodes and a 1-hour Christmas special. Eight concerts were live-streamed, and clips were put on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@appysessions>. Amazingly, the Christmas special was broadcast over 108 channels across the whole country!



-Dr. Warren Dockter



HISTORY HAPPY HOUR WRAPS UP A SUCCESSFUL FIRST YEAR OF PROGRAMMING

History Happy Hour (H3) has completed its inaugural year with three H3 members-only programs at the East Tennessee History Center. Members of H3 will be invited to a planning meeting early in 2024 to determine the year's programming. Activities may expand to include additional informal get-togethers in historic locations and a ticketed dinner exclusive to H3 members. To join, go to easttnhistory.org/H3. Current sponsors are **Jerry and Emily Lenn**. Because all H3 membership fees go to support the East Tennessee Historical Society, the group seeks additional cash and in-kind sponsors to cover costs. If you're interested in being a sponsor, contact Gay Lyons at lyons@easttnhistory.org or 865-384-5549.

-Dr. Gay Henry Lyons



A TRIBUTE TO CARL AND PEARL BUTLER & EXHIBITION OPENING

In early October, ETHS Members and special guests gathered to celebrate East Tennessee country music legends Carl and Pearl Butler at the opening of the feature exhibition *They Sang What They Lived: The Story of Carl and Pearl Butler*. At this once-in-a-lifetime opening, a tribute was led with performances by the Paul Brewster and Friends Band, comprised of 14-year-old mandolin prodigy Wyatt Ellis and *Grand Ole Opry* performers Daniel Grindstaff, Kent Blanton, Stephen Burwell, and John Meador. Guests, including members of the Butler family, then screened 8mm home movies, as well as some of the Butlers' rarest television appearances. *They Sang What They Lived*, sponsored by **The Clayton Foundation** and **Downtown Knoxville Alliance**, will be on display in the Rogers-Claussen Feature Gallery until August 18, 2024.

-Kelley Weatherley-Sinclair



MONSTERS TAKE OVER THE MUSEUM ON HALLOWEEN WEEKEND

Monsters of all ages joined us at the Museum of East Tennessee History at the end of October. This popular event featured a variety of Halloween-themed children's crafts, story times, and walking tours. Children also trick-or-treated throughout the *Voices of the Land* permanent exhibition to learn about Halloween histories and eerie Victorian mourning customs. A special thank you to **Downtown Knoxville Alliance** for sponsoring this event.

-Kelley Weatherley-Sinclair



INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

Our own Dr. Warren Dockter was selected to interview General David Petraeus for the Churchill Society of Tennessee in Nashville. General Petraeus was promoting his new book, *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine* (2023). Dr. Dockter and General Petraeus discussed offensive strategic leadership from President James K. Polk to Winston Churchill to President George H.W. Bush. General Petraeus went on to discuss his personal relationship with President Bush and his admiration of his courage.



-Dr. Warren Dockter

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

FENTRESS COUNTY FENTRESS COUNTY CELEBRATES BICENTENNIAL

December marked the end of the weeks-long Bicentennial celebration in Fentress County. Martha Wiley, president of the Fentress County Historical Society, served as chairperson of the Bicentennial Committee. FCHS presented or was significantly involved in all the programs and activities that occurred during the celebration.

The events celebrating the county's 200th birthday began September 23rd with an old-time get-together in Jamestown's Historic Courthouse Square and continued until December 16th when it ended with the traditional Christmas Parade, led by Parade

Grand Marshals Clara Hinds and Minnie Cooper, sisters who are 101 and 108 years old, respectively.



During the twelve-week interval, numerous Bicentennial events took place in the Historic Fentress County Courthouse, around the Square, and in other nearby locations, including lectures, demonstrations, and tours focusing on people, places, events, and other topics of historical interest. A cemetery tour led by Arthur Bohanan, graveyard forensics expert and author of *Who Are You Walking On?*, followed by his video presentation on the subject, was a somber but fascinating program. Bill Landry, retired producer/host of WBIR's *Heartland Series*, held audiences fascinated by his presentation and stories of filming in Fentress County and East Tennessee.

Although we who are living in Fentress County today were not here to experience in reality the events of the past two hundred years, thanks to the Fentress County Bicentennial Committee, we were given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience them through this unique window to the past.

-Mary Robbins

KNOX COUNTY HISTORIC RAMSEY HOUSE OPENS NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION



We invite you to visit the Historic Ramsey House's permanent exhibit, *A Community Born of Water and Stone*, and learn about the rich history of the Fork of the River area in east Knox County. The exhibit introduces the neighbors of the Ramsey family and includes stories of the Cherokee, the enslaved persons, and other families who settled in the Fork. The exhibit is located in the Maxwell Doak Ramsey Memorial Gallery in the Event Center.

The Fork is a historic wedge of fertile land with limestone seams between the French

Broad and Holston rivers. It encompasses the entire area in Knox County between these two rivers all the way to the Jefferson and Sevier County lines. In a symbolic sense, water and stone – one fluid and self-leveling, the other hard and unyielding – correspond to the forces and obstacles that shaped the Fork and its people from the 1700s, through the Civil War, and into the 1900s.

-Jan Loveday-Dickens





Deadline March 15. Visit easttnhistory.org/awards for more info and download a nominations form.



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East Tennessee Historical Society

DOWNTOWN HOME TOUR