

Tennessee Association of Museums Scholarship Winner 2019

My name is Paige Brevick and I am a recent graduate student from the University of Memphis, where I just completed my MA in Egyptian Art and Archaeology, with a certificate in Museum Studies. Throughout my undergraduate education I interned and worked at museums, so I've known for several years that this industry is a good fit for me. Being new to Tennessee, I was eager to connect with other museum professionals and understand more about the museum community in Memphis. I currently work as a graduate assistant at the Art Museum of the University of Memphis (AMUM) and as a part-time consultant on curatorial practice and collections management at Bible Museum on the Square in Collierville, TN.



On a recent trip to the UK, viewing animal mummies at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

I was first selected to attend the Tennessee Association of Museums conference in 2018, but last minute conflicts with my graduate school schedule prevented me from participating. Though I was discouraged, TAM staff were overwhelmingly positive and supportive, encouraging me to apply again the following year. So, it is with great thanks that I reapplied and was given the opportunity to participate in TAM's 2019 conference, with the theme of "Connect, Cultivate, Sustain." This year's theme was especially meaningful to me, because my dream is to have a career that focuses on museum inclusivity and sustainable heritage management. I had such a wonderful experience! At the TAM conference I met dozens of friendly Tennessee museum professionals, attended thoughtful and engaging sessions, and participated in exciting conversations about museum sustainability.

One of the things that I like about the annual TAM conference is that it takes place in a different part of Tennessee each year. The 2019 conference was hosted in Clarksville, TN. As a busy graduate student it can sometimes be hard to get away from your studies, but the TAM conference was a great way to explore a new part of Tennessee and socialize with new people who I otherwise wouldn't have met. Our hotel was right next to the river, offering beautiful views of the bluffs and forests.



Scholarship winners pictured in center: Susan Holcraft, Paige Brevick, and Joseph Gamble.

Meeting the other scholarships winners from Tennessee right away was a highlight of my experience at TAM. We were able to navigate the conference together and we traded notes about any presentations we didn't attend, that way we were able to experience even more of the conference! Susan Holcraft (West TN) shared insight with me about her recent work at the White House Inn Museum as a visitor attendant, and I enjoyed getting to know Joseph Gamble (East TN) who works as a curator and historic re-enactor at the Sgt. Alvin C. State Park. Together we discussed how to better engage museum-goers. This was helpful for me because I typically work "behind-the-scenes" at museums in research or collections, but understanding your museum visitor is at the heart of sustaining a successful museum.

The opening night reception and awards ceremony was held at the beautiful Customs House Museum. This museum is home to historic relics of Clarksville, features work by local artists, and even includes a replica log cabin home from the 1840s. At the museum, I was grateful for the chance to speak with staff about what they like about the industry - everyone was passionate about their TAM connections! Every year TAM honors museums across the state for their work in education, collections, volunteerism, and more. The awards ceremony is not only a time to recognize leaders in the field, but gave me an opportunity to learn more about museums outside of Memphis and see what new initiatives have been successful. I was pleasantly surprised to

find out that Bible Museum on the Square took home six prestigious awards from the TAM Awards Ceremony, for work on education, exhibitions, and volunteer contributions.

Bible Museum on the Square took home six honors, including two Awards of Excellence for their Jesus Revealed and Away in 100 Mangers exhibitions. Pictured: Paige Brevick, James Barnette, Museum Director Craig Gyergyo, and TAM President Ken Mayes



Of course, the main part of the conference is attending the many talks held by museum professionals. I especially enjoyed participating in the Curator/Collection round-table style talk hosted by Bethany Hawkins (AASLH) and Brooke Mundy (Collierville Museum of History) on the theme of sustainability. Curators from the state shared their methods on sustainability specific to their department - this is a topic that is very important for small and large museums alike, as space, facilities, and funding surrounding collections is often limited. One concern that was discussed was the trend of the "collect now" initiative, wherein curators actively seek out objects from events happening in present-day, usually associated with protests or activism. While I agree that it is important for museums to save objects from events happening now, I think that it is equally valuable for curators to adhere to a clear collecting plan, ensuring that the objects they collect support the overall museum mission.

Another talk I found quite meaningful was Danielle Spalenka's (Northeast Document Conservation Center) presentation *Exhibiting Collections and Preservation*, which addressed common issues in safeguarding museum collections. She shared her experience in managing collections care and presented simple steps that museums could take to ensure the longevity of their collections. Spalenka's presentation included before/after photos demonstrating the damage that can occur from improperly displayed objects, such as light discoloration or tension left on books. I liked that this talk incorporated advice for museums at all levels, sizes, and budgets so that each may make a meaningful impact in their collections care. While collections care may not be the most exciting museum topic, safeguarding your museum collection is a key part of sustaining it for future appreciation. This talk reminded me of the significant, yet sometimes overlooked role that collections managers can have in public outreach because they are in a position to advocate for better facilities and exhibition design. Curators and collections

managers may educate the public on how they can care for their own heirlooms and artworks at home.

This year I am excited to share that I will be completing my PhD at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London starting in October 2019. My research focus is on sustainable heritage management in the Middle East and North Africa, with an emphasis on community involvement and outreach methods from local museums. I hope to devote my life to a career that highlights the community narrative in museum collections. My dream job is to work in a curatorial position at The British Museum, or for UNESCO.

Though working in the Middle East presents its own challenges unique from Tennessee, the same principles of museum sustainability apply: connecting to and empowering your local audience, safeguarding your collection to the best of your abilities, and active collaboration with both your colleagues and community. TAM does an excellent job of promoting these goals and connecting its members to the resources they need to be successful. At the 2019 TAM conference, I felt welcomed into the museum community and left assured that I had a network of supportive museum professionals to reach out to.

I hope to stay in touch with many of the friends I met at TAM. For me, TAM serves as a model for success in the broader museum world. TAM members and institutions strive to better themselves, encourage learning among museum professionals, and are vocal about ethical issues facing museums today. I will take everything I learned at TAM with me wherever I go in the world. And I hope to one day return to Tennessee to make a difference in museums and their communities, in a place where I have felt truly supported. Thank you!