


# East Tennessee History Day Dispatch

  
EAST  
TENNESSEE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

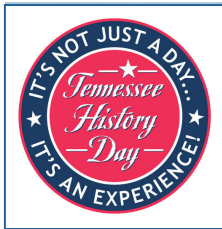
  
Department  
of History

## Tenn. Students Take D.C. By Storm! 6 Students Snag Medals at Nationals

Volume 1, Issue 2  
Fall 2009

### History Day Calendar

- September 24, 2009 —  
NHD Teacher Workshop  
“Taking it to the Next  
Level” 4:00-6:00 p.m.,  
East Tennessee History  
Center, Knoxville  
(registration required)
- March 1, 2010 — 9th  
Annual East Tennessee  
History Day, University  
of Tennessee
- April 17, 2010 —  
Tennessee History Day,  
Legislative Plaza,  
Nashville



  
NHD  
NATIONAL  
HISTORY DAY

After months of intensive research and success at local and state-level competitions, 47 students from Tennessee presented their projects at the Kenneth E. Behring National History Day (NHD) competition held at the University of Maryland at College Park in the Washington, D.C. area June 14-18<sup>th</sup>. “This phenomenal group of students from Tennessee conducted thorough research and produced high quality projects to become the best History Day students in the state of Tennessee. The students, their teachers, and parents have much of which to be proud,” states Kelly Wilkerson, State Coordinator for Tennessee History Day.

Maranda Vandergriff, Elisa Vandergriff, and Elijah Gray became the highest ever placing students from Tennessee at the national NHD contest when they took second place in Junior Group Documentary for their project on “Dr. Robert F. Thomas: The Great Smoky Mountains Horseback Healer of Body and Soul.” The team of three home-schooled students from Knox County (Vandergriff’s) and Sevier County (Gray) selected Dr. Thomas, a physician and minister who arrived in Sevier County in 1926 and remained until his

(Continued on pg. 4)

### Inside this issue:

<i>From the Coordinator's Desk</i>	2
<i>From the State Coordinator's Desk</i>	3
<i>NHD Photo Gallery</i>	6-12
<i>Sevier Co. Student Wins 7th at NHD</i>	13
<i>McMinn Students Put Booth on Trial</i>	14
<i>Getting Right With the 2010 NHD Theme</i>	16-17
<i>2010 Theme Worksheets</i>	18-19

## From the Coordinators' Desk

By William E. Hardy & Lisa N. Oakley, E. Tenn. History Day Co-Coordinator

Tennesseans should be very proud of the success of Tennessee students at this year's Kenneth E. Behring National History Day competition. The state flag was not only flown proudly but also worn with great pride on the backs of a diverse group of students residing throughout the Volunteer state during the competition.

The 2009 national contest was a first for both of us to attend. In the process we learned so much from viewing the nation's best and brightest students whose passion and knowledge of history was on display in the hundreds and hundreds of student exhibits, documentaries, performances, websites, and research papers that advanced from thousands of local and state competitions across the nation and abroad to vie for scholarships, special awards, and medals. It's wonderful to see students, teachers, and parents embracing the principles on which the History Day program was established (see below a copy of the program's mission statement that Kelly Wilkerson, Tennessee History Day state coordinator, shared with us recently).

After having viewed a wide spectrum of projects and carefully analyzing the projects that placed first, second, or third at nationals, two things became quickly apparent. First, Tennessee students possess all the necessary skills it takes to win at the highest level in each of the categories. Having worked with several

History Day teachers more closely than ever before this past year, we are aware of the high quality of history instruction in Tennessee classrooms from the elementary level to the high school level. In addition, parents being actively involved in their children's educational process is also a standard among those students who have reached the national level. With strong support at both school and home, students' skills and their understanding of history and the world around them evolve immeasurably. The student who learns the lessons and skill sets of the History Day program begins to produce projects that can have historical impact. Students begin to learn the craft of a historian and the History Day project they develop is equivalent to the scholarship produced by graduate level history students laboring to receive an M.A. or Ph.D. in university graduate programs.

Secondly, we both noticed that the power of telling good stories, backed up by solid historical evidence (unearthing available primary and secondary sources), is, as it always should be, favored by the judges over projects that are high on the glitz factor (cuteness/technical savviness) and short on good solid history complimented by a riveting and smoothly constructed narrative. In addition, parents with students competing in the documentary category were also quick to note that some of the highest quality documentaries, in respect to their Ken Burns-esque look, were not selected first, second, or third in the final round. Instead, projects that contained powerful stories complimented by good solid historical research, as evidenced in their Process Papers and Annotated Bibliographies, were more likely to rank in the top positions.

As everyone gears up for the 2009-2010 NHD season, it is important to keep in mind the dates of this year's district and state competitions. In most instances, there will be approximately 6-7 weeks in between contests. For those who advance out of district, there is ample time to examine the judges' feedback and work towards developing what was a district project into one which is competitive at both the state and national levels. Year after year, it is evident by the success of those students who continue to tinker and consult additional resources (scholars who specialize in the era of the student's topic in particular), that these students are competitive at the state level and often advance into the final rounds of nationals (if not earning a special award or medal in the process). Given the level of competition at district, it would be wise to focus significant attention on building a primary source based project at district and have a grasp of the secondary source literature of the topic (know at least 3 major works on the topic and the era along with what are those historians' main arguments and theses). It might also be instructive to begin communicating with university professors, public historians, or experts on the topic prior to the district contest. Getting started early in the school year and using time wisely can be advantageous to the "scholar" developing a History Day project.

Inside this issue of the *Dispatch* you will find a wrap-up on the 2009 Kenneth E. Behring National History Day contest with numerous photographs and stories highlighting the achievements of Tennessee students. Special to this issue is Kelly Wilkerson's (Tennessee History Day Coordinator) article, which spotlights the success of History Day in Tennessee as well as the state program's success at the national level. In addition, Wilkerson mentions several online resources recently launched and available on the Tennessee Historical Society's website at [www.tennesseehistoryday.org](http://www.tennesseehistoryday.org). Finally, in an attempt to take a critical look into the 2009-2010 NHD annual theme, we have included an article entitled "Getting Right with the NHD Theme" accompanied by 2 theme worksheets adapted from this year's NHD theme book. As always, we hope this and future issues of the *Dispatch* can serve as an additional resource for you as you tackle History Day.

### **History Day Mission Statement:**

**The future of democracy depends on an inspired, thoughtful and informed citizenry. Historical understanding is crucial to that process. National History Day teaches essential historical literacy that motivates students to secure the future of democracy.**



## From the State Coordinators' Desk

By Kelly Wilkerson, Tennessee History Day Coordinator



***“I had so much fun! I can’t wait to start working on my project for next year.”***

***“I had a lot of fun and I know my friends did too.”***

—High School students

***“My daughter spent the entire ride home talking about her project for next year and the History Club she is going to start at her school.”***

—Parent of High School student

As a public historian and the state coordinator for Tennessee History Day, hearing the statements above about the History Day program made my day! I received them all by e-mail upon returning to Nashville following the National History Day competition in College Park, Maryland on June 14-18. The enthusiasm for history shown by the students participating in the History Day program at all levels is so infectious and these statements aptly describe it.

The 2008-2009 competition year was a significant one for the Tennessee History Day program which serves as the state affiliate of National History Day. After numerous years of great support and leadership from the faculty and graduate student staff in the Department of History at the University of Memphis, the Tennessee History Day program moved its headquarters to Nashville and became a program of the Tennessee Historical Society. At the Society, our staff and our board of directors were so excited to become more closely involved with the program and anxious to see what new challenges and opportunities such a program would bring.

While students were frantically researching their “Individual” in History and their teachers were busy overseeing their work, I spent the year learning what it means to be the state coordinator and planning for the state level competition. Before the state competition, though, comes all the hard work put in by the district coordinators to host their competitions. In late February and early March, I attended four outstanding district competitions and saw terrific work first hand by the students and their teachers and the staffs hosting the competition.

First up was the West Tennessee competition in Memphis at AutoZone Park and sponsored by the University of Memphis and the Memphis Redbirds. Next was the Middle Tennessee competition at Middle Tennessee State University and sponsored by the Department of History at MTSU. Following that was the East Tennessee competition at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and sponsored by the East Tennessee Historical Society and the University of Tennessee History Department. Finally, the Southeast Tennessee competition was held at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and sponsored by the Chattanooga History Center. The quality of student work at these competitions was so impressive! In all, nearly 900 students participated at a district competition in Tennessee. 223 of those students advanced on to the state competition on April 4 in Nashville. 47 of those students competed at the Kenneth E. Behring National History Day Competition in June at the University of Maryland and 6 of those students came home with National Prizes!

Throughout the year, the districts and the state office worked hard to bring new teachers and new schools into the History Day community. We launched a new website, a Facebook page, a History Day Blog, and got to know many more students and teachers. We learned a lot more about Individuals in History of local, national, and international influence. We learned plenty about technology and the new and interesting ways students are using it to tell great stories. We participated for a second year in the new “Website” category and saw increased participation in this category from the prior year. NHD Executive Director Cathy Gorn visited us in Tennessee for our state competition and spoke to the Tennessee State Senate about the importance of history in schools and encouraged them all to support the History Day program. And for the third time in history, Tennessee students took home national awards! Overall, it was an incredible year full of learning and opportunities to meet many terrific parents, teachers, and students, all of who love learning and are enthusiastic about studying history.

On the national level, many exciting changes also occurred. A philanthropist by the name of Kenneth E. Behring became the title sponsor for the National History Day competition and the National History Day program received federal funding for the first time under the American History and Civics Education Act originally sponsored in 2004 by Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander. Strengthening the History Day program, this increased funding is due to many years of hard work by NHD Executive Director Cathy Gorn and the NHD staff and will greatly benefit us in Tennessee for many years to come.

The 2009-2010 competition year brings a new theme, “Innovation in History: Impact and Change”, a new website for National History Day, and new changes to the website category. Stay tuned to our website at [www.tennesseehistoryday.org](http://www.tennesseehistoryday.org) for more information about these changes. As always, your district and state coordinators welcome questions, comments, and suggestions to help make the History Day program better for all Tennesseans! Please do not hesitate to contact me at the Tennessee Historical Society office at 615-741-8934 or by email at [historyday@tennesseehistory.org](mailto:historyday@tennesseehistory.org). I look forward to hearing from you and seeing you all soon at the next East Tennessee district competition!

## 6 Students Snag Medals at Nationals

(continued from pg. 1)

death nearly 60 years later, as their History Day project. The students' success did not come without a lot of work—eight months in fact. “A lot of studying, a lot of research, and putting it all together,” said Elijah Gray. Countless hours were spent interviewing several Sevier County residents and digging for letters, journals, scrapbooks, photographs, and much more in the archives of both the Dr. Robert F. Thomas Foundation and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP). Among two of the biggest interviews the students snagged for their documentary were Laverne Thomas (Dr. Thomas's son) and Dolly Parton, who wrote a song in honor of the doctor who delivered her in 1946. The students were shocked and excited when they learned they would get to interview Parton for their documentary. “She looks just like she does on TV, and she sounds just like she does on TV. She's just kind of Dolly Parton, you know?” Elisa said (for more on this project, see *Dispatch* Vol. 1, Is. 1).

Other East Tennessee students to earn honors at the national NHD contest included Grace Highbanks of Signal Mountain, winner of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Award in Early American History for her Senior Individual Exhibit on “‘Our Marquis’: Lafayette in the American Revolution.” Emma Thompson of Tellico Plains took the Outstanding State Entry for Tennessee in the Junior Division for her Junior Individual Exhibit on “I See Something: William S. Gray and the Dick and Jane Readers.” Hannah Clevenger of Sevierville won the Outstanding State Entry for Tennessee in the Senior Division for her Senior Individual Documentary on “Evelyn Bishop: Crafting a Legacy in the Tennessee Mountains.”

***“This phenomenal group of students from Tennessee conducted thorough research and produced high quality projects to become the best History Day students in the state of Tennessee. The students, their teachers, and parents have much of which to be proud”***  
—***Kelly Wilkerson, TN NHD Coordinator***

The NHD program annually engages over a half million students in grades 6 through 12 from 49 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, and Department of Defense Schools. Each fall students nationwide begin the yearlong National History Day program, competing in a series of history contests in their local communities and states. The top students in each category are selected for participation in the national contest. In Tennessee, district competitions take place in Knoxville (East Tennessee Historical Society & University of Tennessee Department of History), Chattanooga (Chattanooga History Center), Murfreesboro (Middle Tennessee State University), and Memphis (University of Memphis.) The state competition is held in Nashville at Legislative Plaza and is sponsored by the Tennessee Historical Society.

Approximately 300 historians and other education professionals evaluated the work of over 2,000 students at the National History Day contest. Nearly \$250,000 in scholarships and cash prizes was awarded at the national contest.

For more information about the History Day program in Tennessee or the program's state-level sponsor, the Tennessee Historical Society (THS), visit the THS's website at <http://www.tennesseehistory.org/historyday.htm> or contact Kelly Wilkerson at 615-741-8934 or by email at [historyday@tennesseehistory.org](mailto:historyday@tennesseehistory.org).



### ***Follow NHD in Tennessee***

**Tennessee History Day is on Facebook & Blogspot (<http://tnhistoryday.blogspot.com>)**

## 2009 NHD Contest Participating East Tennessee History Day Students



\*\*\*\*\* JUNE 14-18, 2009 \*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\* UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND \*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\* COLLEGE PARK \*\*\*\*\*

1) Maranda Vandergriff, Elisa Vandergriff, and Elijah Gray, home schooled students from Powell. Junior Group Documentary, "Dr. Robert F. Thomas: The Great Smoky Mountains Horseback Healer of Body and Soul." Teachers: Katie Vandergriff and Sabrina Gray.

2) Rachel Collins and Josh Huff of Ft. Loudoun Middle School in Loudon. Junior Group Performance, "Saucy's Letters to the Tyrant of Freedom." Teacher: Joe Davis.

3) Emma Thompson of Coker Creek Elementary in Tellico Plains. Junior Individual Exhibit, "I See Something: William S. Gray and the Dick and Jane Readers." Teacher: Shannon Harris.

4) Stephen Bassett of Greenway School in Knoxville. Junior Individual Documentary, "Jesse Owens: A Race for Equality." Teacher: Liz Shugart.

5) Sarah Margaret Hutchison of Greenway School in Knoxville. Junior Individual Performance, "Jeanette Rankin: A Voice for Peace." Teacher: Liz Shugart.

6) Michelle Woodruff of Englewood Elementary in Englewood. Junior Individual Performance, "Queen Elizabeth I." Teachers: Susie Lee and Heidi Ford.

7) Kiyoko Reidy of Greenway School in Knoxville. Junior Individual Paper, "John Steinbeck: A Bard for the Okies." Teacher: Liz Shugart.

8) Blake Brashear of Concord Christian School in Knoxville. Junior Individual Paper, "Steven Jobs: Impact and Innovations to the Personal Electronics and the Computer Animated Industry." Teacher: Tammy Lightholder.

9) Timothy Blackwell of Greenway School in Knoxville. Junior Website, "Turning vs. Enigma: The Battle for the Code." Teacher: Liz Shugart.

10) Parks Barroso, Alan Shattuck, and Noah Williams of West High School in Knoxville. Senior Group Exhibit, "Mark Felt: The Man Behind the Voice." Teachers: Candace Lewis and Lou Gallo.

11) Nathan Steyer, Jordan Brown, Matt Stanifer, Keerthighaan Kanagasegar, and Elizabeth Ashby of the Tennessee Governor's Academy in Knoxville. Senior Group Documentary, "Robert Oppenheimer: The Man Beneath the Hat." Teacher: Patricia Brake.

12) Zachary Arms and Brett Parsons of McMinn Central High School in Etowah. Senior Group Performance, "John Wilkes Booth: Put on Trial." Teacher: Teri Blair.

13) Hannah Clevenger of Gatlinburg Pittman High School in Gatlinburg. Senior Individual Documentary, "Evelyn Bishop: Crafting a Legacy in the Tennessee Mountains." Teacher: Rebecca Byrd.

14) Mia Wallace of West High School in Knoxville. Senior Individual Documentary, "Jim Thompson: The Unsung Hero of East Tennessee History." Teachers: Candace Lewis and Lou Gallo.

15) Mary Biggs of Bearden High School in Knoxville. Senior Individual Paper, "Nancy Ward: Peacemaker and Beloved Women of the Cherokee." Teacher: Liz Shugart.

16) Lily Gu of the Tennessee Governor's Academy in Knoxville. Senior Individual Paper, "Rush's Revolution: Marvelous Methods for the Mad." Teacher: Patricia Brake.

# 2009 NHD PHOTO GALLERY



National History Day headquarters at the University of Maryland at College Park.



Above: Rachel Collins (Loudon Co.) prepares to go on stage as Abigail Adams in her and her partner's (Josh Huff) Junior Group Performance.



Left: Brett Parson (left) and Zachary Arms (right) (McMinn Co) minutes after performing their Senior Group Performance "John Wilkes Booth." (see pg. 14)

Below: (from left to right) Timothy Blackwell and Stephen Bassett (Knox Co.) participate in the "Parade of States" at the closing ceremonies.



# 2009 NHD PHOTO GALLERY



Above: Parade of states during the closing ceremony of the NHD contest.



Left: Sarah Margaret Hutchison (Knox Co.) fields questions from the judges following her Junior Individual Performance “Jeannette Rankin: A Voice for Peace”

Right: Tennessee Governor’s Academy students Elizabeth Ashby, Nathan Steyer, Matt Stanifer, (not pictured) Jordan Brown, and Keerthighaan Kanagasegar took their Senior Group Documentary on Robert Oppenheimer to nationals.



# 2009 NHD PHOTO GALLERY



Above: West High (Knox Co.) student Mia Wallace poses with her mother.



Above right: Trading Tennessee buttons for buttons from other states.



Right: Elijah Gray (Sevier Co.) responds to a judges question during the Junior Group Documentary 1st Round.

Below left: Michelle Woodruff (McMinn Co.) as Queen Elizabeth I

Below right: Kelly Wilkerson leads the TN NHD meeting at nationals.





# 2009 NHD PHOTO GALLERY



Above left: Grace Hughbanks (Hamilton Co.) carries the TN Flag during opening ceremonies.

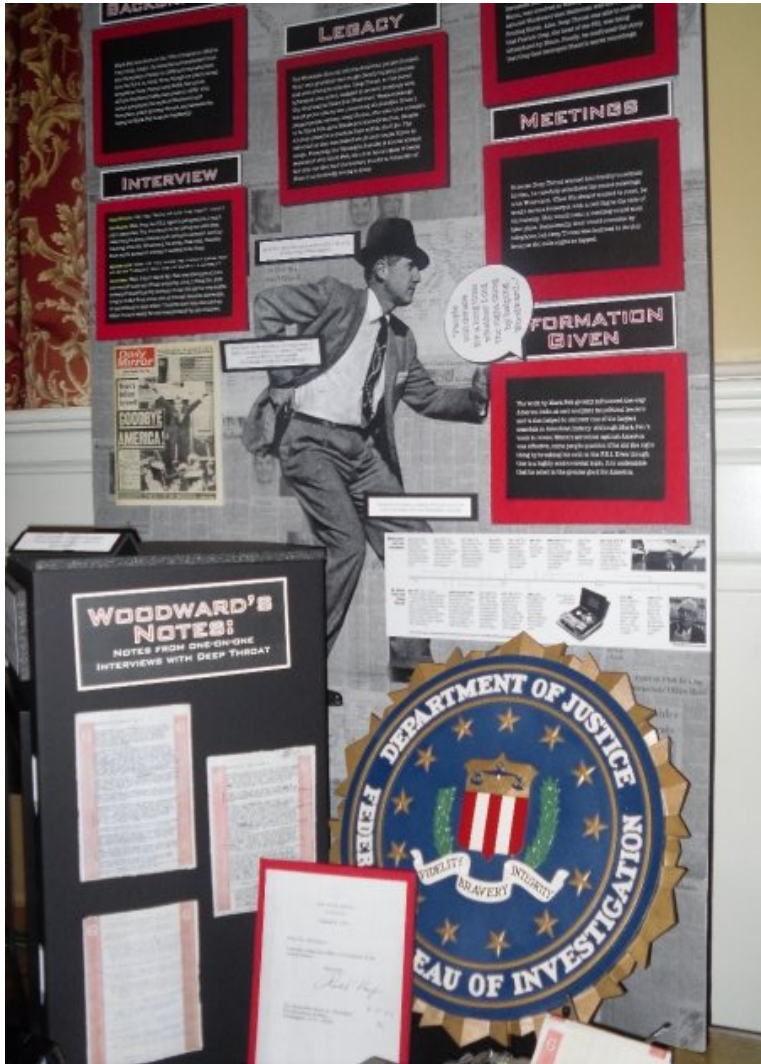
Above: Bearden High (Knox Co.) and veteran NHD participant Mary Biggs at the closing ceremony.

Left: TN History Day pizza party

Below (left and right): Closing and Opening ceremonies respectively.



# 2009 NHD PHOTO GALLERY

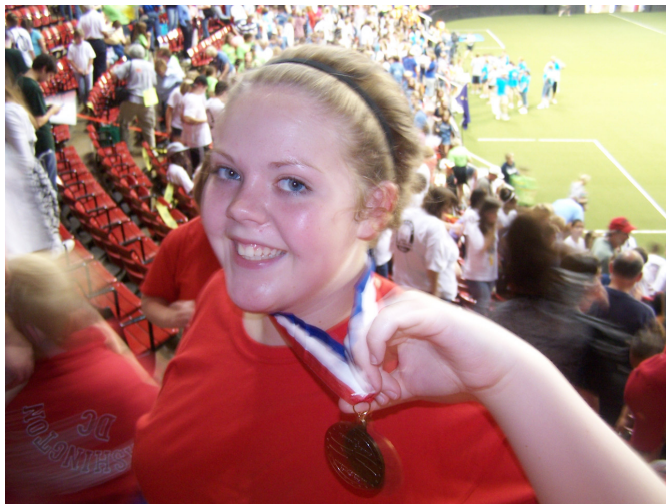


Left: West High (Knox Co.) students Parks Barroso, Alan Shattuck, and Noah Williams's project on Mark Felt on display during the national contest.

Below: Emma Thompson's (Coker Creek Elementary, Monroe Co.) exhibit on William S. Gray on display during the national contest. Thompson's board earned her an Outstanding State Entry Award.



Below: Emma Thompson shows off her medal as the Junior Division's Outstanding State Award winner.



# 2009 NHD PHOTO GALLERY



Left: Grace Hughbanks's (Hamilton Co.) 8th place Senior Individual Exhibit project "Our Marquis Lafayette' in the American Revolution."

Below: In addition to earning 8th place for her Senior Individual Exhibit on Marquis Lafayette, Grace Hughbanks won the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Award in Early American History.



Right: (from left to right) Maranda Vandergriff, Elisa Vandergriff, (Knox Co.) and Elijah Gray (Sevier Co.) became the highest ever placing students from the state of Tennessee at the National History Day contest. The students stop as photographers snap their photos moments after walking across the stage to receive their silver medals for their winning Junior Group Documentary project entitled, "Dr. Robert F. Thomas: The Great Smoky Mountains Healer of Body and Soul."



# TENNESSEE HISTORY DAY GOES TO WASHINGTON



As it has become tradition in recent years, Tennessee History Day students visit Washington and meet with Tennessee Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker at “Tennessee Tuesday”.



# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## Gatlinburg-Pittman High Student Wins 7th Place At National Contest & Earns A Medal For Outstanding State Senior Project



Hannah Clevenger (center) stands next to her mother Gail Clevenger (left) and teacher Rebecca Byrd (right) after winning the Senior Division Outstanding State entry Award and placing seventh overall at the national contest.

“I had tough competition,” said Hannah Clevenger a few weeks after winning first place in the Senior Individual Documentary division at Tennessee History Day in Nashville in April. Hannah’s first place wins at both the district and state contests earned her a spot in the Kenneth E. Behring National History Day contest in which the Gatlinburg-Pittman High School (GPHS) student faced stiffer competition—approximately 100 of the nation’s best high school students with, in many cases, polished documentaries worthy of being aired on the History Channel or PBS.

Hannah, in her second year of participating in the National History Day program, placed second last year in the district contest for her Junior Individual Documentary entitled, “Faith of a Farm Girl: Joan of Arc’s Bravery in Conflict as the Turning Point of the Hundred Year’s War.”

Building on both her knowledge of the NHD program and her technical skills, Hannah opted to develop a documentary again during this year’s contest. Although Hannah’s interest in French history inspired her previous project, she did not have to

look too far from her own community for the topic of her 2009 NHD project.

The freshman GPHS student selected as her topic Evelyn Bishop, one of the earliest and most prominent directors of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, and documented her contributions to the rich arts and crafts community that flourished in Gatlinburg beginning in the 1920s. Prior to the 1910s, one-room schoolhouses with most teachers lacking a high school education were the norm in Southern Appalachia. A visit by the Pi Beta Phi fraternity in 1910 convinced them that Gatlinburg was a community where they could make a difference. Thus, the fraternity established the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School in 1912. In July 1914, Evelyn Bishop and her father, who had arrived in East Tennessee two years prior, traversed 17 miles of the region’s most rugged back roads to attend the official dedication of the Pi Phi’s new six-room schoolhouse. Bishop, who provided music programs for schools in the region, became the settlement school’s director in 1917 at the age of 30. For the next 15 years, Bishop served as the school’s director, playing a significant role in the establishment of a nationally renowned center for arts and crafts education that had profound economic and social benefits for the surrounding community. Documenting both the individual actions and legacy of Bishop, Hannah observes that “Miss. Evelyn’s 15 years as school director were the most altering in the settlement school’s history and the legacy of her work lives on.”

Rather than simply telling the story of Bishop and her role in East Tennessee, Hannah carefully places the actions and legacy of Bishop in the context of both American and world history. The conscious decision of the Pi Beta Phi fraternity to select Gatlinburg as a service project is placed within the context of the larger Progressive movement of the early twentieth century. In addition, Hannah addresses the Spanish Influenza that made its way to Gatlinburg in 1919. The deadly disease, which killed many worldwide, was not as severe in Southern Appalachia. However, Bishop’s work to help care for those who had fallen ill played a significant role in curbing some of the mountain people’s distrust of outsiders, whom they typically referred to as “furriners.” Hannah’s documentary also covers the effects of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the establishment of a national park in the region. Hannah argues that Bishop’s belief in the settlement school never wavered. To close her documentary, Hannah selected a poignant response that Bishop offered when asked if the work of the settlement school was complete, which demonstrated Bishop’s vision of the school and its legacy to the community: “It is only done when we lose interest and vision of what there is to be done.”

Hannah’s documentary reveals the countless hours that she spent in the archives amassing an extensive collection of photographs that are carefully situated throughout her film with music and sounds of weavers at work that places the viewer inside the school. Hannah explains, “The most challenging thing was getting all my research in order and writing the narrative. I had to leave a lot of things out and just include the most important facts.”

Hannah credits most of her success in earning both 7th place in the Senior Individual Documentary category at the National History Day contest and an Outstanding State Award to two teachers in particular: Rebecca Byrd (New Center School) and Richard Cross (GPHS). “I want to thank them for continuing to foster my love of history.”

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

### McMinn Central High Students Put John W. Booth On Trial

The events surrounding the fateful evening of April 14, 1865 are well known in the pages of American history textbooks. Yet new books focusing on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln continue to litter bookstore shelves. With the Lincoln bicentennial nearing the conclusion of a 2-year nationwide celebration, these books add to an ever-increasing historiography that includes several studies based on solid historical evidence. The authors of many of these recent works, however, have merely cashed in on the Lincoln bicentennial proclaiming to offer a new and fresh interpretation of the events surrounding the first successful presidential assassination. The historical dialogue continues nearly 145 years later. This, in spite of the fact that the general account of the assassination, with the exception of debate over Dr. Samuel Mudd's role, has long been settled.

Most historians eschew counterfactual history (the "what if" questions); however, in the case of Lincoln's death, many choose to engage in the exercise to ascertain the relative importance of the event and the consequences of Booth's actions on the course of American history from April 1865 to the present.

With the 2008-2009 NHD theme "The Individual in History: Actions and Legacies," McMinn Central High students Zachary Arms and Brett Parsons decided to engage in a counterfactual history exercise by posing the question of "what if" John Wilkes Booth had not died, but had in fact stood trial for murdering President Lincoln. Their project emphasized not only the actions of Booth and his band of conspirators, but also the consequences of those actions in regards to Reconstruction in the South and the painfully long and arduous path to the Civil Rights movement.

Based on solid primary (Booth's diary and contemporary newspapers) and secondary sources (scholarly studies of not only the assassination but also of the Civil War era), Arms and Parsons wrote a script that had Parsons, in the role of John A. Bingham (Ohio U.S. House Representative and House Manager during President Andrew Johnson's

*"I have ended  
the life of a  
tyrant"*

— *Zachary Arms  
in his role as  
Booth.*

impeachment trial) and Arms (an actor himself) as the flamboyant Shakespearean stage actor Booth. Both Parsons and Arms capture their individual's character and demeanor as Parsons grills Booth on the stand and Arms reacts in a variety of emotions from rage, disgust, and pleasure as he recounts his "heroic actions" for his beloved South. Their costumes also helped place them within the context of 19th century Civil War America. While Parsons wore a contemporary suit to district, Arms was able to piece together a suit that looked appropriate given the era. However, prior to the state contest in Nashville, they contacted the Oak Ridge Playhouse and were able to get suited in period costumes for a discounted price.

Parsons and Arms begin their performance with a monologue that sets the stage of Lincoln's assassination and carries the narrative through his subsequent death when surrounded by Union soldiers nearly two weeks later at Richard Garrett's Farm in rural northern Virginia. They conclude their monologue by asking what if Booth had not been killed and had been put on trial, "maybe it would be like this."

What unfolds next is a nearly 6 and half minute court scene in which Bingham calls Booth to the stand to shed light on the events of April 14, 1865 and the assassin's escape and "capture" 12 days later. In a poignant scene, Bingham asks, "how do you plea?" Without hesitation, Booth replies, "Not guilty, because it was not a crime to kill the tyrant President Lincoln.... The man was



**Brett Parsons as Dist. Atty. John A. Bingham (left) and Zachary Arms (right) as John Wilkes Booth. In this scene, from the district contest in Knoxville, Booth describes in sordid detail how he shot Lincoln.**

— **Dan MacDonald Photography**

a slaveholding tyrant." Relishing the chance to tell his story, Booth notes that he had originally planned to kidnap Lincoln; however, the fall of Richmond in early April and Lincoln's mention of the possibility of extending suffrage to the freedmen convinced him that Lincoln should be killed.

Parsons and Arms weave passages from Booth's diary throughout their performance. During Booth's testimony he mentions that he shouted "*sic semper tyrannis*" (death to tyrants) before pulling the trigger, which is accurate according to Booth's recollection recorded in his diary as he eluded federal authorities in the wake of the assassination. But Bingham quickly interjects previous testimony from witnesses inside Ford's Theatre that testified that they heard Booth shout the Latin phrase only after he had leaped from the president's box.

Bingham closes his case by claiming that Booth had killed a man who could make Reconstruction as painless as possible and that he only hoped Vice President Andrew Johnson will follow in Lincoln's footsteps—but history did not unfold as Bingham hoped. In closing, Parsons and Arms depict the consequences of Booth's action by navigating the subsequent course of the nation's history, thereby revealing the unfortunate legacy Booth bestowed on American history.

# COMING MARCH 1, 2010!

*Online Registration Opens January 1 and Closes February 12*

## 9<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EAST TENNESSEE HISTORY DAY


A District Contest of  
National History Day



Sponsored by:

 *The University of Tennessee*  
**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

*and*

  
EAST  
TENNESSEE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

## Getting Right With The 2010 NHD Theme: “Innovation in History: Impact and Change”

More than 50 years ago famed Abraham Lincoln biographer David Herbert Donald encouraged historians to “get right” with Lincoln in a collection of essays on various aspects of Lincoln. Donald noted that an inherent ambiguity surrounding the myth of Lincoln had crystallized in the body of historical scholarship on the nation’s 16th president. He argued that Lincoln had come to be seen as anything to everyone—a vessel for competing political ideologies. In many ways, the NHD annual theme is anything to everyone.

The National History Day staff employs an annual theme to provide students with a lens through which they can examine history as they develop their projects—the end result being a better understanding of both history and the world around them. In sum, according to the NHD staff, the “theme is intentionally broad enough that students can select topics from any place (local, national or world history) and any time period.” Therefore, according to the nature of how NHD defines the annual theme, no topic is off limits. However, once students select their topics, they *must* conduct a thorough investigation of the available **primary** and **secondary** sources in order to place their topic in *historical context*, demonstrate their topic’s *historical significance*, and present an air-tight case for their topic’s *relation to the theme*—**all parts of the theme**. That is, simply telling the history of a specific innovation, in the case of the 2010 NHD theme, does not cut it. A student’s History Day project—or any written assignment they are required to complete—must answer the critical question that all historians must ask of their topic, “*so what?*”

The study of history is the art of asking questions. Once a historian has selected a topic to begin researching, and has determined that the topic is manageable—that is, there are sufficient primary and secondary sources to warrant an article or book-length manuscript—they must begin to ask questions of their topic to determine whether the topic that they have chosen meets certain historical standards (i.e. a glaring historical gap in the literature on the topic, previously unavailable primary sources that shed new light on the topic, changes in society that merit a reinterpretation of the topic, etc.). While students are not held to these professional standards in the development of their History Day projects, the process they undergo in the planning and design of their projects as they continue through competition levels, is essentially graduate level historical training. The guidelines established by the NHD staff are largely in accordance with what is expected of collegiate history students. Historians ask an endless amount of questions about their topic, and so should History Day students! These questions frame the design of the project.

Good thoughtful questions build historical understanding. If a topic is not critically examined by asking a series of thought-provoking questions, then the project will result in what simply reads as a standard report. At best, the questions answered might involve the who, what, when, where, and how—a basic elementary lesson and journalistic mantra. But the study of history is not simply about doing a reporter’s job, it is the work of an investigator. Asking thought-provoking questions about one’s topic unlocks the historical meaning of the topic. It is not merely reporting facts from the past but attempting to understand the past by constructing an historical interpretation from individual pieces (primary sources) of a jigsaw puzzle assisted by secondary sources (the interpretations of other historians constructed as a result of their own research). The only way to gain a better understanding of that past is to be creative in the questions one asks of their topic. Below is a sample list of questions which will help with all parts—**innovation**, **impact**, and **change**—of the 2010 Theme:

### Questions

Is the topic indeed an innovation—what exactly is new and different and also the result of human ideas or actions?

Who was involved in the creation, design, or implementation of the innovation (innovators, inventors, or anyone  
(continued on pg. 17)



## Getting Right With The 2010 NHD Theme (cont.)

who played a part in the course of the innovation from its origins)?

Why did this innovation happen at a particular time and in a particular place (what was occurring in society that facilitated the innovation)?

What, if anything, did the innovation refine or replace?

What need or needs in society did the innovation fill and what changes occurred to society as a result of the innovation?

What benefits/consequences did the innovation provide and to whom?

Did the innovation make life easier or did the innovation add more work (did it make life easier for some but harder on others)?

How did people react—accept, reject, or ambivalent—initially in the short term (within a few years/decade)?

How did people react—accept, reject, or ambivalent—over the long term (more than a few years/decade or decades/century or centuries—change over time)?

If accepted by people, how long did it take for the innovation to be adopted or put into working practice?

How did it change people's ideas, scientific knowledge, everyday human behavior, political processes, law, etc.?

Did the innovation influence people locally, nationally, or globally (how specifically has local communities, states, nations, or human history been influenced)?

Has, since its adoption or rejection, the innovation been supplanted by other innovations and, if so, how long did that replacement occur (briefly note what the new innovation was and its impact and change)?

These questions may be of some help in the development of a history project but they by no means constitute a complete and final list. Like digging for primary and secondary sources, historians continue to brainstorm about additional questions that can be asked of their topic throughout the research and writing process.

Whereas the questions asked guide the research process, the answers to these questions—taken collectively—enable a historian to construct an historical interpretation (thesis statement) of the past. Opinions formed from the various primary and secondary sources assembled in the development of the project enable the historian to form their arguments to support their thesis. Continuing to develop and refine historical interpretations and arguments based on numerous thought-provoking questions will not only enable a better historical understanding but also will enable one to “get right” with the 2010 NHD annual theme, *Innovation in History: Impact and Change*.

*See pages 18 & 19 for NHD designed strategy worksheets for the NHD annual theme.*

# NHD Theme Scavenger Hunt

**Strategy:** First, introduce the NHD theme and suggest a few possible topics. Next, have students open their textbooks and skim either the text or index for 2-3 possible topics and how they fit into the theme. By filling in the boxes of the Scavenger Hunt (below), students test examples of possible topics. Have students present their topic idea(s) and explain the process for deciding whether their topic(s) fit the criteria for this year’s theme “Innovation in History: Impact and Change.”

## Scavenger Hunt: Innovation in History: Impact and Change

Topics	How does this topic fit the theme?	What was the impact of this innovation?	What was the long term change caused by this innovation?	What was the historical context that influenced this innovation at this particular time and place?
1.				
2.				
3.				

# Building the Historical Context

**Innovations never occur in a vacuum. Time and place matters. Since time and place influence historical events, it is impossible to analyze the “Impact and Change” of an innovation without a thorough understanding of the historical context.**

**Strategy:** After students have selected their topic, require students to read about the historical era in which their topic falls in first. For example, if a student selected the cotton gin as their NHD topic, have them read about the late 18th and early 19th century and the impact of cotton not only in the United States but also globally. As they complete their initial secondary research, have the students fill in the graphic organizer below, which focuses student thinking regarding how the innovation both influenced history and was influenced by historical context.

**Historical Context Chart**

	Political	Cultural	Economic	Social	Intellectual
How did history influence the innovation?	<p>Thomas Jefferson (Secretary of State)</p> <p>Alexander Hamilton's "Report on Manufactures"</p>		<p>Cotton – need to separate seed from the fiber Cotton gin revolutionized cotton farming &amp; boosted profits of the south</p> <p>Eli Whitney's first model – used to request patent</p> <p>Expense of Whitney's gin caused many to copy plan to make their own at cheaper cost</p>	<p>Increase in domestic slave trade</p>	
How did the innovation influence history?				<p>The expansion of the domestic slave trade</p> <p>Slaves were illegally brought to the U.S. after 1808 because of demand</p>	

## CONTACT US

William E. Hardy & Lisa N. Oakley  
Co-Coordinator, East Tennessee History Day  
East Tennessee Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1629  
Knoxville, TN 37901

Phone: 865-215-8875/865-215-8828

Fax: 865-215-8819

E-mail: [hardy@east-tennessee-history.org](mailto:hardy@east-tennessee-history.org)  
[oakley@east-tennessee-history.org](mailto:oakley@east-tennessee-history.org)

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.tennesseehistoryday.org](http://www.tennesseehistoryday.org)  
**Click on East TN**  
**District News**

*Making history personal*



**EAST  
TENNESSEE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

[www.east-tennessee-history.org](http://www.east-tennessee-history.org)

## TEACHERS, GOT NEWS??? GOT STORIES???



**Newspaper copies of NHD in East Tennessee**  
—East Tennessee Historical Society's NHD Archives.

Have your students' History Day successes, or perhaps you yourself, appeared in print in past years? If so, please let us know. Each year, the successes of East Tennessee students are reported in local newspapers, as well as school district newsletters and or websites.

Many teachers submit articles to their local newspaper, and, if we

are fortunate enough to catch wind of the piece, we will obtain a copy for our records at the East Tennessee Historical Society (ETHS). Each year the ETHS's staff collects copies of newspapers and prints out online articles related to East Tennessee History Day students. Collecting these articles is very important as we approach prospective sponsors and state legislators to provide funding assistance for National History Day not only in the region, but also throughout the state. We also include copies of articles in packets mailed to sponsors each year for cash awards and door prizes.

These articles are vital pieces in our arsenal as we highlight the success of the NHD program in Tennessee. If you have copies of stories related to NHD in your classroom, please let us know. We would very much appreciate obtaining a copy for our records.

Do you have a great story that might be of interest in an upcoming issue of the *East Tennessee History Day Dispatch*? If so, drop us a line. We welcome submissions by guest columnists—**teachers and students**—in an effort to cover the extent of National History Day throughout East Tennessee.

### Next Issue:

- **Context! Context! Placing Your History Day Project In Context**
- **Developing A District Project, Developing A State And National Project**
- **What's New At East Tennessee History Day In 2010**

*\* Articles subject to change\**