



**LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK:
POSITIONING MUSEUMS FOR THE NEXT 250 YEARS**

WVAM ANNUAL CONFERENCE
APRIL 23-25, 2026 | WHEELING-TRIADELPHIA, WV



ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND MEETING

April 23 - April 25, 2026

Wheeling-Triadelphia, WV



WEST VIRGINIA
ASSOCIATION
OF MUSEUMS

ABOUT WVAM

The mission of the West Virginia Association of Museums is to serve, educate, advocate for, and enhance communications within the museum community. WVAM carries out this mission by listening to its members, serving their interests, and keeping members informed of current standards and activities on a national scale.

The West Virginia Association of Museums was organized in 1989 and officially established when the Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC) met in Charleston, West Virginia, in 1990. At that time, the local planning committee decided to create a state association that would benefit the institutions, professionals, volunteers, and others interested in the museums of the Mountain State. They voted to adopt a constitution and bylaws and form the West Virginia Association of Museums (WVAM).

The WVAM Board of Directors is comprised of a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, immediate past president, and six directors-at-large. The Board meets bimonthly to conduct the affairs of WVAM.



West Virginia Association of Museums

P.O. Box 4589

Morgantown, West Virginia 26504

museumsofww@gmail.com

<https://www.museumsofww.org>



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Individual \$25

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Institution Level 1 (1-4 people) \$50

Institution Level 2 (5-10 people) \$100

Institution Level 3 (11-20 people) \$200

Student \$15

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FOREST**
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Conference Exhibitors – Located in Salon C

Disciples of Christ Historical Society (Bethany, WV)

Kruger Street Toy & Train Museum (Wheeling, WV)

The Magic Lantern, LLC (Pittsburgh, PA)

Marshall County Historical Society (Moundsville, WV)

Moundsville Public Library (Moundsville, WV)

Northern Appalachian Coal Mining Heritage Association (Fairmont, WV)

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Read stories about the amazing people, places, and experiences that make Wheeling wonderful on our CVB Blog!



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1401 MAIN STREET • WHEELING WV 26003

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SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

Thursday events at Scottish Rite Cathedral, Wheeling
Friday/Saturday events at The Highlands Event Center, Triadelphia
\$ indicates additional cost

THURSDAY, APRIL 23RD

	Pre-Conference Tours \$	Leave from Scottish Rite Cathedral
3:00PM - 4:30PM	Tour of WV Independence Hall	WV Independence Hall
6:00PM - 7:00PM	Registration Open	Scottish Rite Cathedral
6:00PM - 8:00PM	Conference Reception	Scottish Rite Cathedral
8:00PM - 9:00PM	Trivia	Scottish Rite Cathedral

FRIDAY, APRIL 24TH

8:30AM - 6:00PM	Registration open	Salon C
9:00AM - 9:30AM	Annual Meeting	Salon A
9:45AM - 11:15AM	Workshops	Salon A & B
11:30AM - 12:30PM	Morning Session 1 Lunch Break	Salon A & B
2:00PM - 3:00PM	Afternoon Session 1	Salon A & B
3:15PM - 5:15PM	Workshop	Salon A
6:00PM - 9:00PM	Conference Banquet, Keynote, and Auction	Salon B

SATURDAY, APRIL 25TH

8:30AM - 5:00PM	Registration open	Salon C
9:00AM - 9:30AM	WVAM Session	Salon A
9:45AM - 11:15AM	Workshop	Salon A
11:30AM - 12:30PM	Morning Session 1 Lunch Break	Salon A & B
2:00PM - 3:00PM	Afternoon Session 1	Salon A & B
3:15PM - 4:15PM	Afternoon Session 2	Salon A & B
4:30PM - 6:00PM	Workshop \$	Salon A

SESSIONS AT-A-GLANCE

FRIDAY, APRIL 24TH

WVAM 2026 Annual Meeting: 9:00AM - 9:30AM

Morning Workshop: 9:45AM - 11:15AM

- Interpretive Writing for Exhibits
- Interpretive Tour Refresh

Morning Session 1: 11:30AM - 12:30PM

- Accessing the Archives: Making Museum Archives More Usable and Relevant to Communities
- Passing the Torch: Mentoring the Next Generation of Museum Professionals

Afternoon Session 1: 2:00PM - 3:00PM

- The Skeletons in Our Closet: Approaching Unprovenanced Human Remains in Collections
- Museum Morale Help Desk

Afternoon Workshop: 3:15PM - 5:15PM

- Building Resilient Museums: Leading from Within for the Next 250 Years led by keynote speaker Dina Bailey

SATURDAY, APRIL 25TH

Abandoned Property Law: 9:00AM - 9:30AM

Morning Workshop: 9:45AM - 11:15AM

- Disaster Preparedness: Lessons Learned at the Smithsonian's HEART Program

Morning Session 1: 11:30AM - 12:30PM

- Hidden History: Western Greenbrier County, West Virginia
- How Did We Do: Program and Exhibit Evaluation Methods and Uses

Afternoon Session 1: 2:00PM - 3:00PM

- Interpreting Contested Pasts: The Rhodesian Case Study
- Preserving for the Next 250: Lessons from 1976 for 2026

Afternoon Session 2: 3:15PM - 4:15PM

- Maps and More: WV Geological Survey Resources for Your Research and Exhibits
- Planning Successful Fundraising Events for Small Museums

APRIL 23RD TOURS

MARSHALL COUNTY MUSEUMS TOUR 9:30AM - 4:30PM, COST: \$25

Tour the Marshall County Historical Society's Cockayne Farmstead and Bloyd House, Grave Creek Mound Archaeological Complex, and the WV State Penitentiary.

GRAVE CREEK & MEADOWCROFT 9:00AM - 5:00PM, COST: \$25

Tour Grave Creek Mound Archaeological Complex and Meadowcroft Rockshelter.

BROOKE COUNTY MUSEUMS TOUR 9:00AM - 4:30PM, COST: \$30

Tour the Kruger Street Train & Toy Museum, Campbell Mansion, and the National American Defenders of Bataan & Corregidor Museum, Education, and Research Center.

THE MUSEUMS OF OGLEBAY 9:00AM - 12:00PM, COST: \$25

Tour the Ogelbay Mansion Museum and the Oglebay Glass Museum.

OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY & WV INDEPENDENCE HALL 1:15PM - 4:30PM, COST: FREE

Tour the Little Museum of Wheeling and go behind the scenes at the OCPL, then join the tour at WV Independence Hall.

TOUR & RECEPTION

CONFERENCE
ATTENDEES ARE
INVITED TO TAKE A
TOUR OF WV
INDEPENDENCE HALL
APRIL 23, 3:00PM -
4:30PM
1528 MARKET ST,
WHEELING

MEET AT INDEPENDENCE
HALL, TOUR BEGINS AT
3:00.



JOIN US TO OPEN THE 2026
CONFERENCE WITH A RECEPTION
AT THE SCOTTISH RITE
CATHEDRAL

APRIL 23, 6:00PM - 8:00PM
83 14TH ST, WHEELING

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE
SERVED
TAKE A TOUR OF THE HISTORIC
SCOTTISH RITE CATHEDRAL!

STAY FOR TRIVIA 8:00PM - 9:00PM

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

FRIDAY

WVAM ANNUAL MEETING

9:00AM - 9:30AM
SALON A

MORNING WORKSHOP

9:45AM - 11:15AM
SALON A

INTERPRETIVE WRITING FOR EXHIBITS

DANIELLE PETRAK
[WATTS MUSEUM, WVU]

FAITH ELLINGTON
[WATTS MUSEUM, WVU]

Good museum writing sparks audience connection and engagement that begins in an exhibit space and travels with them into their broader communities. In a 90-minute session, our workshop will offer tools for writing clear and effective exhibit panels, object labels, and other written interpretive content. With real-world examples, drafting exercises, discussion questions, and expert tips, this workshop is designed to demystify museum writing. In small groups, attendees will draft and edit museum text that conveys universal themes, historical context, and exhibit-specific topics.

MORNING WORKSHOP

9:45AM - 11:15AM
SALON B

INTERPRETIVE TOUR REFRESH

KATIE THOMPSON
[WILLIAM A. NEAL MUSEUM OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES, WVU]

Tours are a staple of museum and site interpretation, but is your tour getting your information across and engaging your visitors in a meaningful experience? Unorganized or unfocused tours can be confusing or uninteresting to visitors and purely scripted tours don't often inspire repeat visitation. In this workshop, Katie Thompson will walk you through the steps of building a thematic interpretive tour to fit the needs of your institution, including creating a theme and narrative to tie your entire tour together, strategies for writing tours, dos and don'ts of tour interpretation, and tips for engaging with visitors.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

FRIDAY

MORNING SESSION 1A

11:30AM - 12:30PM

SALON A

ACCESSING THE ARCHIVES: MAKING MUSEUM ARCHIVES MORE USABLE AND RELEVANT TO COMMUNITIES

LYDIA WARREN

[FRANK AND JANE GABOR WEST VIRGINIA FOLKLIFE CENTER]

Archives can be magical places where musicians hear inspiring old recordings, researchers learn groundbreaking historical information, and community members experience stories and objects that bring the past to life. Archives can also sit unused due to disorganization, intimidation, and lack of staffing. In this presentation, I discuss the ways the Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center staff have worked to activate the archive. Methods include obtaining and awarding unrestricted grants with low-barrier applications, connecting with artists who bridge the past and present, upgrading software, training student workers, and advocating for more staffing.

MORNING SESSION 1B

11:30AM - 12:30PM

SALON B

PASSING THE TORCH: MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION OF MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

HEATHER HARRIS
[ART MUSEUM OF WVU]

VIRGINIA AFFEMANN
[ART MUSEUM OF WVU]

BETHANY MCCLUNG
[ART MUSEUM OF WVU]

KAYLEE CERBUS
[ART MUSEUM OF WVU]

SKYLAR KROMER
[ART MUSEUM OF WVU]

As museums look to the future, it is necessary to train the next generation of museum professionals. At the Art Museum of WVU, we have expanded from having student workers as front desk and gallery docents to creating an Education Team and developing a professional pipeline for students and recent graduates. These various positions help students throughout their educational careers to gain the professional experience needed to enter the museum field. While we are uniquely able to hire so many students as a university museum, a focus on mentorship and developing young professionals is valuable to all museums.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

FRIDAY

AFTERNOON SESSION 1A

2:00PM - 3:00PM

SALON A

THE SKELETONS IN OUR CLOSET: APPROACHING UNPROVENANCED HUMAN REMAINS IN COLLECTIONS

OLIVIA JONES
[WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY]

JACOB SMERTNECK
[WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY]

ADRIENNE "REN" KULLY
[WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY]

Donated collections containing human remains may not be recognized during initial intake by museum staff and the myriad of enquiries received regarding human remains suggest that human remains are not uncommon holdings in museums both large and small. This session approaches a sensitive subject with practical advice and care. We present an ongoing project from WVU as a case study and offer recommendations for staff who may not know where to start with human remains collections. These individuals require provenance research for proper repatriation and care; they also represent larger concerns of institutional ethical guidelines and legal responsibility.

AFTERNOON SESSION 1B

2:00PM - 3:00PM

SALON B

MUSEUM MORALE HELP DESK

CRYSTAL WIMER
[WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS/WV GEOLOGICAL & ECONOMIC SURVEY]

In this informal and interactive session, conference attendees can join a moderated conversation along with this session's attendees. Whether you want to seek advice, brainstorm solutions, or simply vent your frustrations, the "help desk" is here to listen. The goal is leave the session with a new idea, suggestion, or some takeaway that might help you manage the issue you're facing. With the museums landscape being erratic for the past year, building community by connecting with our peers is especially important for problem solving and maintaining morale.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

AFTERNOON WORKSHOP

3:15PM - 5:15PM

SALON A

BUILDING RESILIENT MUSEUMS: LEADING FROM WITHIN FOR THE NEXT 250 YEARS

DINA BAILEY

[MOUNTAIN TOP VISION]

As museums look ahead to the next 250 years, resilience begins from within. This interactive workshop introduces the Resilience Playbook—an internal framework for navigating change, strengthening leadership, and aligning teams around purpose. Participants will explore how values, decision-making, and organizational culture shape a museum's ability to respond to complexity and uncertainty.

Through guided reflection and practical exercises, attendees will assess their own institutional resilience and identify concrete strategies to strengthen it. Designed for museums of all sizes, this session offers adaptable tools to support more responsive, grounded, and future-ready organizations.

FRIDAY

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

CONFERENCE BANQUET 6:00PM - 9:00PM SALON B

Dinner, Keynote Address, Auction

6:00.....Dinner

6:50.....Presentation of Awards
Museum Service Impact Award
Innovative Programming Award
2024 Institution of the Year

7:00.....Keynote Address

8:00.....Last Call for Raffle Tickets & Silent Auction

8:15.....Raffle and Sype Auction

At our annual conference, we auction off the opportunity to host Sype the Muskrat at one our state's museums or historic sites. "Sype" is named in honor of former WVAM board member, Larry Sypolt. Anyone can nominate a museum to host Sype. Audience members then pledge money towards the site that they want to be the host, trying to make sure their preferred site gets the most pledges to win. Everyone who pledges pays at the end, regardless of if their site wins. Proceeds from the Sype auction support scholarships for next year's conference.

* Raffle * Silent Auction * Live Auction *

Proceeds go towards WVAM operations, workshops, and conference scholarships.

Awards Sponsored by



FRIDAY

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

“WHAT WE CARRY FORWARD: EVERYDAY DECISIONS AND THE FUTURE OF MUSEUMS”

Museums hold a unique role in our communities—stewarding stories, objects, and ideas that help people make sense of the past and imagine what's possible for the future. But not everything gets carried forward equally. Every decision—what we collect, interpret, prioritize, or revisit—helps shape how the future will understand the past.

Thinking about the next 250 years can feel like a big, abstract task. But the future isn't built all at once. It takes shape through small, everyday choices—often made in moments of constraint, competing priorities, and uncertainty. Where do we most often pause or feel stuck? What

pressures shape our decisions? And what becomes possible when we approach those choices with greater clarity and intention?

Grounded in research and real-world practice, Dina Bailey offers a practical and encouraging way to think about change—so that as we look back and look ahead, we feel more confident in what we are carrying forward and why.

Dina Bailey is founder of Mountain Top Vision, where she partners with museums and cultural institutions, along with foundations and other mission-driven organizations, navigating complexity, change, and heightened public responsibility.

Dina has held leadership roles at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, and the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. She serves on the board of the American Alliance of Museums and Transform 1012 North Main Street and taught in Johns Hopkins University's museum studies graduate program.

Dina is currently a doctoral student at New York University, where her research focuses on leadership under pressure and organizational culture.



FRIDAY

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SATURDAY

WV ABANDONED PROPERTY LAW

9:00AM - 9:30AM

SALON A

Join members of the WVAM board for a brief discussion on this year's efforts to pass HB5059, clarifying state abandoned property law to benefit museums and cultural institutions.

MORNING WORKSHOP

9:45AM - 11:15AM

SALON A

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: LESSONS LEARNED AT THE SMITHSONIAN'S HEART PROGRAM

OLIVIA JONES

[WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY]

The Smithsonian's Heritage Emergency and Response Training (HEART) is a unique and competitive course designed to train museum and heritage staff in disaster preparedness. In this 90-minute session, attendees will get an overview of a disaster plan, examples of disaster materials, and case studies relevant for West Virginia museums. Following a presentation, attendees will be given handouts for drafting disaster preparedness policies and lists for their institutions, such as collection priorities, emergency contact numbers, and damage assessment. The workshop will conclude with a roundtable discussion of attendees explaining their needs or experience with disasters and recovery efforts.

MORNING SESSION 2A

11:30AM - 12:30PM

SALON A

HIDDEN HISTORY - WESTERN GREENBRIER COUNTY, WV

VICKY NEAL

[GREENBRIER HISTORICAL SOCIETY]

Hidden History showcases the coal mining, timbering and railroad industries of western Greenbrier County, WV during the early 20th century. The industries were successful due to the hard work of the people and the various cultures/immigrants that moved to the area seeking employment. This "project" includes a collection of oral/video history interviews conducted throughout the county. In addition, historical data, photographs, and artifacts were collected from community members to promote the exhibit. Plans are to open a permanent museum in western Greenbrier County that will highlight this subject in an exhibit. In addition, classroom instruction on the subject is currently being delivered in Greenbrier County 4th, 8th and 11th grades.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SATURDAY

MORNING SESSION 2B

11:30AM - 12:30PM

SALON B

**HOW DID WE DO: PROGRAM AND EXHIBIT
EVALUATION METHODS AND USES**

CRYSTAL WIMER

[WVAM/WV GEOLOGICAL & ECONOMIC SURVEY]

JOE OBIDZINSKI

[WVU JACKSON'S MILL]

In this session, participants will learn the importance of conducting evaluations for programs and exhibits at their museums. The presenters will present both formal and informal methods which include youth and adult surveys, observational mapping, simple tags, and more. They will discuss how incorporating evaluations as a regular practice strengthens your organizational health by ensuring you are delivering impactful educational programs and exhibits as well as gathering tangible data necessary for reporting. Such reporting can be a vital tool to guide institutional leadership and decision-making by providing staff, presenters, and other stakeholders quantitative as well as qualitative information to help shape that process.

AFTERNOON SESSION 1A

2:00PM - 3:00PM

SALON A

**INTERPRETING CONTESTED PASTS:
THE RHODESIAN CASE STUDY**

FRANCIS E. ROSARIO RIVERA

[BETHANY COLLEGE]

A 60-minute presentation examining Rhodesia's 1965 UDI as a model for how museums can interpret contested histories, conflicting narratives, and legally entrenched systems. The session uses archival material, activist testimony, and military accounts to demonstrate how states construct historical legitimacy and how public historians can responsibly present politically charged pasts. Attendees will explore strategies for framing decolonization, bureaucracy, and memory in accessible, nuanced ways for diverse audiences.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SATURDAY

AFTERNOON SESSION 1B

2:00PM - 3:00PM
SALON B

***PRESERVING FOR THE NEXT 250:
LESSONS FROM 1976 FOR 2026***

ELIZABETH NICHOLSON

[JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION / BOSTON ARCHITECTURAL COLLEGE]

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, historic house museums are again preparing for renewed public attention. In the rush to restore buildings for the 1976 Bicentennial, many institutions altered or removed historic fabric and simplified layered histories in pursuit of polished narratives. This session treats the historic house as the largest and most complex object in the collection, examining how commemorative urgency shaped preservation decisions in 1976. Drawing lessons from that moment, we will consider how to steward, interpret, and sustain these buildings responsibly as we prepare them for the next 250 years.

AFTERNOON SESSION 2A

3:15PM - 4:15PM
SALON A

***MAPS AND MORE: WV GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
RESOURCES FOR YOUR RESEARCH AND EXHIBITS***

CRYSTAL WIMER

[WEST VIRGINIA GEOLOGIC AND ECONOMIC SURVEY]

For more than 125 years, the West Virginia Geological & Economic Survey has conducted geologic research for the benefit of industry, government agencies, academia, and the public. This session will give an overview of the agency's maps, publications and photograph collection that are more useful for historical researchers and exhibit developers. Additionally, the procedures for accessing these resources will be explained as well as where to find interactive maps, data, publications catalog, and geoscience education resources on the agency's website.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SATURDAY

AFTERNOON SESSION 2B

3:15PM - 4:15PM
SALON B

PLANNING SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISING EVENTS FOR SMALL MUSEUMS

NATHAN JONES
[WVAM]

Drawing on experience producing successful fundraising events for the Craik-Patton House Museum in Charleston, West Virginia, this presentation explores practical strategies for planning and executing effective fundraising events for small museums. Topics include volunteer coordination, venue selection, budgeting, sponsorships, invitations, tax acknowledgment letters, and event insurance, with a focus on realistic, sustainable approaches for institutions with limited staff and resources.

2025-2026 WVAM BOARD

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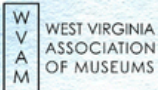
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CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

SHIFTING VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS WORKSHOP

Small museums are not losing volunteers—they're outgrowing outdated systems. National data shows volunteerism is rising, yet recruitment and retention challenges persist when roles lack flexibility, accessibility, and meaning. Shifting Volunteer Expectations is a hands-on workshop created specifically for small museums and solo professionals navigating this shift.

You'll explore:

- Why "traditional" volunteer models exclude people
- How flexibility becomes a form of accessibility
- Short-term, remote, and skills-based engagement strategies
- Practical tools like the MMRI framework and inclusive intake models

This session moves beyond theory and into 7 Day Real-World application—designed for solo practitioners, museums with limited staff, time, and resources.



April 25, 2026



4:30–6:00PM



The Highlands Event Center

Cost:
\$15 for conference attendees
\$20 for non-attendees

Register at www.museumsofww.org/annual-conference



Speakers: Dr. Jennifer Rogers & LaShell Martinez

KALEIDOSCOPE HERITAGE FOCUS

<https://kaleidoscopehf.com/>



PRESENTER BIOS

AFFEMANN, VIRGINIA

ART MUSEUM OF WVU

Virginia Affemann is the DeLynn Program Coordinator for Education and Outreach at the Art Museum of WVU. They began their time at the Art Museum of WVU in 2023 as a student worker and grew interested in educational outreach as they became more involved in programs at the Museum. After receiving a BA in Anthropology from WVU, Virginia took a role as a program assistant helping with tours and events before becoming the program coordinator.

CERBUS, KAYLEE

ART MUSEUM OF WVU

Kaylee Cerbus is a student worker at the Art Museum of WVU and a third-year Art History major. Kaylee assists with educational programs and K-12 school tours at the Museum, and hopes to work in and hopes to work in collections research or education in a museum setting after graduation.

ELLINGTON, FAITH

WATTS MUSEUM, WVU

Faith Ellington, PhD, is the assistant curator at the Watts Museum. Her background includes museum curation, archival research, and teaching. At the Watts Museum, she particularly enjoys writing exhibits and developing programs.

HARRIS, HEATHER

ART MUSEUM OF WVU

Heather Harris is the Curator of Education at the Art Museum of West Virginia University where she designs curriculum-integrated experiences for PK-12, undergraduate, and graduate students. She also directs all community outreach efforts and is a service assistant professor of art history and museum professions in WVU's School of Art and Design. Harris teaches museum studies courses that emphasize hands-on experiences for students in the galleries of the Art Museum of WVU and beyond.

JONES, NATHAN

WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

Nathan Jones is a former museum professional based in Charleston, West Virginia, currently working with WVU's Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative. He previously served for seven and a half years as Executive Director of the Craik-Patton House Museum, where he planned and led successful fundraising events. His experience centers on volunteer-driven programming and practical, sustainable fundraising strategies for small cultural institutions.

PRESENTER BIOS

JONES, OLIVIA

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

Dr. Olivia A. Jones (PhD University of Groningen) obtained her B.A. from WVU and an M.A. from University College London in the United Kingdom. Jones' doctoral research focused on approaching Mycenaean (Late Bronze Age) mortuary practices with a bioarchaeological methodology. Her current research examines Mycenaean infant burial practices and human remains with a multi-faceted methodology including paleopathology and aDNA analyses. Jones is also actively engaged in fieldwork as the bioarchaeologist on multiple projects in Greece. In addition to her academic research, Jones has worked in contract archaeology in the eastern US and was the Lead Curator at the Grave Creek Mound Archaeological Complex in Moundsville, WV. Dr. Jones' teaching specialties include human osteology and the anthropology of death.

KROMER, SKYLAR

ART MUSEUM OF WVU

Skylar Kromer is a first year student at West Virginia University. She began working with the WVU Art Museum as a student worker with the education team at the start of her first semester. Working towards a BFA in Art Education she assists with museum K-12 school tours, story hour, and gallery attendant duties. Skylar's time with the education team provides her with essential hands-on experience within art museums education work.

KULLY, ADRIENNE "REN"

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

Adrienne "Ren" Kully is an Anthropology major with minors in Professional Writing and Medical Humanities and Health Studies, graduating in December 2025. During their time at WVU, they have been involved in anthropological and anatomical research, beginning with the Research Apprenticeship Program (RAP) in 2022, followed by SURE and multiple independent research projects. Their research interests include bioethics, skeletal biology, and human variation, with a focus on how biological and cultural factors shape our understanding of the human body. Ren's capstone project, which explored the demographics ethics behind the WVU human osteological collection, was awarded the Robert F. Munn Scholars Award. In addition to their research, Ren serves as a Lab Manager for the WVU Archaeology Lab, supporting the lab's mission of fostering hands-on learning and advancing collaborative research.

PRESENTER BIOS

MCCLUNG, BETHANY

ART MUSEUM OF WVU

Bethany McClung is a recent graduate of West Virginia University with a BA in Design Studies. In her senior year, she joined our team at The Art Museum of WVU as a student worker and was influential in our museum education programs. After graduation she was offered a part time position as a Teaching Artist, which allows Bethany to still assist us with tours, community outreach, and social media communications.

NEAL, VICKY

GREENBRIER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

An Art educator for 24 years, Vicky retired in 2018 and has worked since then with various civic organizations to improve the economy and future opportunities for their communities. As an AmeriCorps member serving with the Greenbrier Historical Society, Vicky is conducting research and oral histories, collecting artifacts and ephemera for the project to highlight the untold story of life and work that centered around the coal, timber and railroad industries of the early 1900s.

NICHOLSON, ELIZABETH

JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

Elizabeth Nicholson is an AmeriCorps service member with the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission and serves as a board member of the West Virginia Association of Museums. They hold a BA in History from SUNY New Paltz and will complete an MA in Historic Preservation at the Boston Architectural College in May 2026. Their research explores the intersection of theology and architectural form, with a focus on the communitarian domestic architecture of the Shaker, Oneida, and Fourierist communities in the United States.

OBIDZINSKI, JOSEPH

WVU JACKSON'S MILL

Joseph (Joe) Obidzinski is the Program Coordinator for History at WVU Jackson's Mill, West Virginia's state 4-H Camp. In that capacity, he oversees the preservation and interpretation of the historic buildings and collections at the site as well as provides history programming for audiences of all ages.

PRESENTER BIOS

PETRAK, DANIELLE

WATTS MUSEUM, WVU

Danielle Petrak, PhD, is the curator of the Watts Museum at WVU. Her past museum experience includes positions at The Frick in Pittsburgh, PA; the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; and the Carlos Museum at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. Danielle's favorite parts of her job include designing and installing exhibits, studying the history of the Appalachian region, and thinking of innovative ways to present that history to museum visitors.

RIVERA, FRANCIS E. ROSARIO

BETHANY COLLEGE

Francis Rosario is a historian and researcher with a strong background in archival analysis, narrative interpretation, and the study of contested pasts. He combines academic training in history at Bethany College with professional experience as a museum tour guide and military service in the Army National Guard, where precision, documentation, and critical evaluation are essential. His work focuses on how law, conflict, and memory shape public understanding of historical events.

SMERTNECK, JACOB

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

Jacob Smertneck is an undergraduate student and co-manager of the West Virginia Archeology Lab where they oversee students in processing artifacts. As an Anthropology and Environmental Sciences dual major, his research interests centers the ethics and provenance of human remains and connects these issues to broader systems of extraction, both material and environmental.

THOMPSON, KATHLEEN

WILLIAM A. NEAL MUSEUM OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES

Dr. Kathleen Thompson is the Curator of the William A. Neal Museum of the Health Sciences at West Virginia University. Prior to her current position she served as a Preserve WV AmeriCorps member for three years, led tours of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, and taught history at several colleges and universities. She earned her PhD in Nineteenth Century/Civil War America from West Virginia University, and also holds a M.A. from WVU and a B.A. from Siena College.

PRESENTER BIOS

WARREN, LYDIA

FRANK AND JANE GABOR WEST VIRGINIA FOLKLIFE CENTER

Lydia Warren is a humanities professional with expertise in museums, cultural centers, and community engagement. She has received grants from the Library of Congress, Mid Atlantic Arts, and WV Humanities Council. She earned a PhD in Critical and Comparative Music Studies from the University of Virginia in 2021, a BA in music from Smith College and a Five College Consortium Certificate in Ethnomusicology in 2014, and an AS in music from Middlesex Community College in 2011.

WIMER, CRYSTAL

WV GEOLOGICAL & ECONOMIC SURVEY / WVAM

Crystal Wimer is a current board member and past president of the West Virginia Association of Museums. She earned her BA in history and MA in public history from West Virginia University. She currently works as for the West Virginia Geological & Economic Survey where she serves as the primary administrator for managing collection acquisitions, loans, historic photograph collection, and the museum store for the agency. Previously, she served as the executive director of the Harrison County WV Historical Society and on the Program Committee for the Southeastern Museums Conference.

*Thank you
for attending WVAM2026!*

PLEASE REMEMBER TO DROP OFF YOUR EVALUATION SHEET AND
YOUR NAME BADGE LANYARD TO THE REGISTRATION TABLE
BEFORE YOU LEAVE!

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