

Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.
University of Missouri | History Department
615 Locust Street | Columbia, MO 65201
scm6nw@umsystem.edu
618-616-9717

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Emily B. Baran, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of History
Middle Tennessee State University
134 Old Main, 223C Peck Hall
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Dear Chair Baran and Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiasm for the tenure-track Assistant Professor of Digital History position at Middle Tennessee State University. With a Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri (2024), graduate certifications in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Museum Studies, and nearly a decade of teaching experience, I bring an interdisciplinary approach that aligns with MTSU's mission to advance digital history, public engagement, and interdisciplinary research. As a historian of digital, environmental, and economic history, I integrate digital methodologies into research, teaching, and public history initiatives, preparing students for careers in both academic and applied historical fields.

My teaching experience reflects a commitment to experiential learning, interdisciplinary methodologies, and applied digital history. At the University of Missouri and McKendree University, I have designed and taught courses in U.S. history, environmental history, world history, and historical methods, incorporating hands-on digital projects. In my U.S. Environmental History course, students coded and categorized primary sources on historical environmental crises, analyzing how narratives about natural disasters shaped policy, economy, and urban development. In *Between the Borderlands*, a special topics course, students developed source-based digital timelines that traced the movement of people, goods, and ideas across early American spaces. These assignments emphasize primary source analysis, digital literacy, and interdisciplinary research, preparing students for both academic and applied history careers. At MTSU, I look forward to designing courses that introduce students to interdisciplinary methods and tools equipping them with technical and analytical skills.

My research examines the intersections of environmental, economic, and digital history, focusing on how the commodification of ecological knowledge shaped early American and transatlantic economies and the project of empire. My book project, *Reciprocities Market: Empire, Economy, and Ecology of John Bartram's 18th-Century Botanical Subscription Service*, argues that Bartram's circulation of culturally and economically valuable plants and knowledge functioned within a hierarchical imperial framework that integrated colonial landscapes into global markets. His botanical exchanges, while often framed as scientific collaboration, were economic transactions that redefined relationships between nature, labor, and commerce. Using ArcGIS, NVivo, and metadata

analysis, I map Bartram's extensive networks across Europe, the Caribbean, and North America, tracing how botanical commodities and the knowledge to classify, cultivate, and market them, became embedded in imperial economies. This project's use of digital tools aligns with my teaching strategy and MTSU's emphasis on digital humanities and provides opportunities to integrate network visualization, text analysis, and geospatial mapping into coursework at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Beyond my monograph, my publishing record highlights my engagement with digital and public-facing scholarship. I am co-editor and annotator of *Legends of Mexico*, a historically significant but out-of-print text - originally published as a serial newspaper editorial during the Mexican American War. Additionally, I have contributed four encyclopedia entries on regional industrialization and environmental history for Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive. I recently became a member of the *Journal of the Early Republic's* masthead, as the Social Media Editor, allowing me to network with preminent scholars and connecting scholarship with public and academic audiences alike. These experiences will allow me to mentor MTSU students in developing digital projects that apply historical methods to archival research, interactive media, and public history initiatives.

I have extensive public history experience, leading projects that connect historical research to public audiences. As a team lead for Madison Historical, a regional digital archive, I took a team of undergraduate and graduate students into small local historical associations and archives where I trained and managed students in oral history collection, metadata creation, and digital curation, resulting in the digitization of over 70 oral histories and dozens of image collections. Students then were able to see the marriage of public and digital history as they not only conducted fieldwork, but then learned how to generate digital exhibits, articles and collections based on that work. Likewise, my time on the O'Fallon Historic Preservation Commission has involved National Register nominations, city level historical preservation projects, digital exhibits, and historic preservation initiatives. These experiences demonstrate my ability to develop collaborative projects that integrate students, community partners, and digital platforms, a focus that resonates with MTSU's commitment to applied and community-based digital history.

MTSU's Public History Program and its campus partnerships offer exciting opportunities to develop collaborative digital projects, engage students in hands-on historical inquiry, and contribute to MTSU's interdisciplinary initiatives. I am particularly excited about the potential to mentor graduate and undergraduate students in digital storytelling, archival research, and public engagement, guiding them through innovative research projects that merge traditional historical methodologies with digital tools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my teaching, research, and public history experience can support MTSU's commitment to digital history, student engagement, and scholarly innovation.

Sincerely,
Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.