

Report by the Secretary on the 2021 SESAHA Conference, Natchez, Mississippi, September 29-October 2

Ralph S. Wilcox, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, SESAHA Secretary

The 2021 annual conference of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians took place in Natchez, Mississippi, from Wednesday, September 29th until Saturday, October 2nd. Carter Burns, Executive Director of the Historic Natchez Foundation, was the chair of the conference committee. The conference hotel was the Natchez Grand Hotel and the Natchez Convention Center served as the location for this year's sessions. Co-hosts for the conference included the National Park Service and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and reception sponsors included the Historic Preservation program at the Tulane School of Architecture and Visit Natchez.

Although the rise of the Delta variant of the Covid-19 virus caused some concern in planning the conference, just over 100 people registered for the conference, which was considered a great success given the circumstances. The conference kicked off on Wednesday evening with the SESAHA Board of Directors meeting and dinner which was held at the Natchez Grand Hotel.

Thursday was the first day of sessions, and they were held at the Natchez Convention Center. The Welcome Address Session included addresses by Jennifer Baugh, outgoing SESAHA President, Carter Burns, Conference Chair and Host, and Kathleen Bond, Superintendent of Natchez Historical Park. The day had three concurrent paper sessions – one in the morning and two in the afternoon – with two or three groups of papers presented during each session. Lunch on Thursday was open so that the attendees could explore the restaurants in downtown Natchez. The day was capped off with a BBQ dinner at Bontura, a house that was built in 1851 as the residence of Robert and Ann Smith, free African Americans.

Friday was the second day of paper sessions and there were four concurrent paper sessions held throughout the day. All of Friday's paper sessions were also held at the Natchez Convention Center, and as on Thursday, there were two or three groups of papers presented during each session. The session titles for the conference once again reflected the diversity of the attendees and the diversity of their research interests. The sessions on Thursday were titled "Monuments: Past, Power, Progress," "Women's Work: Architecture, Landscape, Preservation," "Introduction to SESAHA: New Members & First-Time Attendees," "Preserving the Architecture of Enslavement," "Places for Reinterpretations," "Mid-Century Designers," "African American Landscapes of the South," "Designing Status," and "The Architect's Intention." Friday's sessions were titled "Places of Work," "Planning and Preserving Cities," "The Digital Lens on the Past," "African American Stories Through Place," "Moving People and Places," "Visions and Plans for a Better Society," "Mississippi Places," "Finding or Losing Cultural Heritage in Preservation," "Places of Worship and Community," "Modernity, Race, and Contradiction," and "Identity and Identification with Architecture."

The Business Meeting and lunch were held at the Carriage House Restaurant at Stanton Hall, and SESAH attendees toured the house before the lunch and meeting. At the meeting, the award winners were announced, and they were:

Best of the South: Yaryan-Phoenix Naval Store Paymaster Office in the Turkey Creek Community of Gulfport, Mississippi.

Fellowship/Grant Recipients:

SESAH Conference Travel Grant for Graduate Students: Ernesto Bilbao (University of Texas at Austin), Kyra Lucas (University of Florida), and Patricia J. Rangel (Georgia Institute of Technology).

Graduate Student Research Fellowship: Dijia Chen, University of Virginia.

Publication Awards:

Book: Nathaniel Walker, *Victorian Visions of Suburban Utopia: Abandoning Babylon* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Article: Avigail Sachs, “Research and Democracy: The Architectural Research Division of the Tennessee Valley Authority.” *Journal of Architecture* 24.7 (2020): 925–49.

Guidebook: Jennifer Baughn and Michael Fazio with Mary Warren Miller, *Buildings of Mississippi*, Buildings of the United States series of the Society of Architectural Historians (University of Virginia Press, 2021).

Friday evening was the Keynote Lecture, which was held at Trinity Episcopal Church. The lecture was given by William C. (Bill) Allen who served as the architectural historian in the Office of the Architect of the Capitol from 1982 until 2010. Allen’s lecture was titled “The Jefferson-Latrobe Collaboration at the Capitol.” The Keynote Reception was held at Elms Court, which was built in 1837 for Eliza and Katherine Evans.

The conference ended on Saturday with the Study Tour, which focused on some of the Townhouses and Country Villas that Natchez is known for. The morning part of the tour visited Auburn, Concord Quarters, Lansdowne and Magnolia Hall, where the participants also enjoyed lunch. The afternoon part of the tour visited Green Leaves, Rosalie, Longwood, and Melrose. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interior of Melrose was closed to visitors, but the other properties were all open for the tour participants.

It was good to once again be able to meet in person this year, and the Natchez conference was a success. Even with the restrictions that were in place due to Covid (i.e., mask wearing indoors and social distancing; closure of some sites, such as Melrose), and the uncertainty due to the rise of the Delta variant, the fact that just over 100 people attended the conference illustrated that a

conference could be held in person, even under the unusual circumstances of the times. We look forward to meeting again for our 40th anniversary in Memphis in 2022!