
A. INTERPRETATION GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

C1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most rapidly growing segments of the tourism industry is heritage tourism, which focuses on historic, cultural, and natural resources that have influenced the settlement and development of a locale. Studies have shown that heritage tourists tend to spend more time and money than other types of tourists, bringing economic benefits to the communities they visit. Visitors are attracted to a unique community identity and seek an experience they cannot find elsewhere. The quality and quantity of the resources in the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area provide opportunities to increase tourism, which creates jobs, enhances quality of life, and instills community pride. Interpretation of resources is key to the visitor experience. Presentation of facts is not sufficient, for it cannot be assumed that every visitor will discern their significance across time. Fixating on facts potentially constructs a vision that misses the “forest for the trees.” Providing interpretation bridges factual data about tangible resources to the intangible concept of their significance. For example, a tangible resource such as a Native American artifact or a tradition such as a musical composition appeals to the senses. Interpretation invites the visitor to consider the deeper meaning of these resources in a broader context: a Paleoindian tool ensured survival, and a plaintive Blues song gave voice to the oppression of African Americans. Interpretation enriches the heritage tourism experience, allowing the visitor to draw on individual experiences to understand a tangible resource in terms of a larger cultural experience.

One of the primary goals of the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area is to promote interpretation of its historic and cultural resources to help stimulate tourism. Public and private partners are encouraged to work together towards that goal. Partners include local museums, historic sites, Main Street programs, environmental centers, festival organizers, municipalities, wildlife and conservation management agencies, and state parks. Some of these groups currently have interpretive programs tailored to meet their specific audiences. They are encouraged to compare their current plans to the recommendations of these MSNHA interpretive recommendations and to network with other groups and agencies that share overlapping or parallel stories. Ultimately, a network of thematic interpretation will make these stories accessible to a wide array of audience types.

C2. KEY QUESTIONS SHAPING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Who Is the Audience?

Audiences expected to visit sites within the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area can be tourists or residents. These may include:

- Heritage tourists are visitors focused on cultural resources such as historic architecture, traditions, and folklife. This type of audience member has typically done some research prior to visiting and has targeted sites of interest.
- Pass-through/passive tourists have not prepared to visit any specific site and could be enticed to explore the heritage area. Visitor centers are a key repository for providing this audience type with information, such as thematic brochures and regional maps that can recommend broad approaches to exploration.

Residents should not be overlooked as both consumers and partners in the interpretive plan. Involving local residents in interpretive efforts fosters pride of place and builds community support. Residents then become ambassadors on behalf of the heritage

- Recreational users, whether visitor or resident, can become stewards of the heritage area. Their

enjoyment of outdoors and appreciation of natural resources has a built-in desire to help protect local ecology. This audience type can enhance personal experience of hiking or canoeing paddling via interpretive kiosks and waysides. Internet sites are also key vehicles for imparting specific information about trails, native flora, indigenous wildlife, and migratory birds.

- School groups comprise an audience type that can be quite diverse intellectually due to age (K-12) and access to information. While younger generations are known to possess superior internet capabilities, fewer school curricula are exposing them to history lessons, especially local history. A web-based educational primer can prepare students for visits to sites within the MSNHA. On-site interpretation should be flexible to accommodate all grade levels. The tangible resources will be able to convey the intangible themes through engaging, age-appropriate instruction and activities.

What Should Be the Audience Experience?

The audience experience can be divided into stages, as follow:

- Desiring: The prospective visitor is aware of and wants to experience an historic site, the opportunities available at that site, and the resulting experiences that may occur.
- Planning: The prospective visitor is researching a destination that best meets their interest, needs, and expectations. The visitor must have access to information involving the potential visit, which can include information on its history, relevance, the weather, nearby accommodations, fees, and directions.
- Traveling: The prospective visitor makes their way to the destination. Directions and signage to the site, or “wayfinding,” needs to be straightforward and clear.
- Arriving. The visitor accesses the site and receives orientation and informational materials about the interpretive opportunities available.
- Visiting: The visitor participates in, enjoys, and learns from the programs, services, and facilities they are exposed to. An important part of the on-site visit is the opportunity for discovery: following the interpretation via wayside exhibits, using a hand-held device that highlights information about the site, or listening to a tour guide explores the events and meaning of the site. The opportunities can help to create and reinforce a positive and memorable experience.
- Leaving: The visitor hopefully had an enjoyable, meaningful, satisfying, safe, and entertaining visit. There is a distinct sense of personal fulfillment at departure.
- Remembering: The visitor shares with others the details of their visit through pictures, stories, and materials they have collected. Their memories are filled with positive recollections of the attraction or site. Follow-up communication through websites, emails, and social media can lead to a return visit and/or financial support.

How Can This Audience Be Informed?

In the creation of this management plan, a series of public meetings and workshops were conducted, resulting in key goals and objectives. One of these was Goal 2, “*Conduct research, education and interpretation related to the MSNHA’s primary themes as a means of documenting and telling the story of the Heritage Area’s unique cultural identity.*” The three primary themes of Native American heritage, the Tennessee River, and Music are all interpreted to various levels through scholarly research and publications, museums, historic sites, driving and walking tours, wayside exhibits and internet websites. While many of these themes and related sub-themes have been researched and interpreted for the public, many areas remain to be further understood and developed. For example, because the Music

theme is so recent in its development, there are many aspects that need documentation and research for future interpretation.

C3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the goal of research, education and interpretation of this management plan are seven objectives recommended through the planning process and public meetings. These seven objectives are presented, along with specific recommendations based upon a review of existing interpretive approaches and resources.

1. Support and/or Sponsor Research into the Various Themes Associated with the MSNHA.

This research may be undertaken by individuals, county school systems, regional universities, non-profit organizations and other entities. Key recommendations include:

- Utilize the University of North Alabama to conduct research into MSNHA's interpretive themes. The University of North Alabama offers both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in History. It has also begun a new program in Public History that offers a master's degree. As the Public History program develops, students should be encouraged to conduct research and complete projects on topics within the MSNHA region. Professors should consult with each county's historical societies and local historians to identify opportunities for hands-on projects. These projects could include the preparation of National Register nominations, cultural resource surveys, and the preparation of text and design for wayside exhibits. The University's Department of Music and Theatre should also be utilized to conduct research into the MSNHA's music theme. In particular, students could assist in recording oral histories of musicians significant in the development of the Muscle Shoals sound and other music-related themes.
- Pursue grants for eligible research projects relevant to MSNHA's interpretive themes. There are numerous foundations that fund research on historic topics, and funding should be pursued for the MSNHA. Examples of funding entities include:
 - *National Endowment for the Humanities* (America's Historical & Cultural Organizations planning and implementation grants)
 - *American Historical Association* (Bernadotte E. Schmitt Grants, the Albert J. Beveridge Grant for Research in the History of the Western Hemisphere, the Michael Kraus Research Grants, and the Littleton-Griswold Grants)
 - *American Antiquarian Society* (offers visiting research fellowships for those interested in American history from colonial times to the Reconstruction era following the Civil War)
 - *Lehrman History Scholars Summer Program* (the Teaching American History grant program awards \$100 million of U.S. Department of Education funds to help teach American history in the country's schools)
 - *Phillips Fund Grants for Native American Research* (offers grants for the study of Native American linguistics and ethno-history)
 - *Alabama Department of Archives and History* (The Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board, using funds provided by the National Historical Preservation and Records Commission, to offer grants

to “assist local governments and historical repositories in developing comprehensive, accessible, and efficiently managed documents and records preservation programs.”)

- *Alabama Historical Association* (To honor the memory of Judge Clinton Jackson Coley and his wife Evelyn Coley, the Alabama Historical Association offers every other year a graduate student grant)

2. Establish an Oral History Program within the MSNHA to Address the Heritage Area’s Primary Themes.

Purpose & Resources

Oral history involves conducting recorded interviews with people who experienced events firsthand. Through this interviewing process, much can be learned about history's meaning in the lives of the people who lived it. Oral history personalizes history by giving us access to subjective stories as told by people who are typically missing from the written record. It makes history come alive as it was experienced, not just factual dry events and dates written in a textbook. It offers the people interviewed an opportunity to make sense and meaning of the events of their lives and provides context for their place in history. There are multiple resources available to learn more about how to record oral histories. Just one example is the book entitled “The Oral History Workshop: Collect and Celebrate the Life Stories of Your Family and Friends” by Hart and Samson. The Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill has several programs designed to assist in the creation of a comprehensive oral history program. The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage is another valuable resource for creating an effective oral history program.

Utilizing Institutions

Oral history programs can be created by public schools, universities, non-profit organizations and city and county governments. Within the MSNHA, the creation of oral history programs within middle schools, high schools and regional universities is one approach for consideration. Such a program would enable area students to more fully understand and appreciate the region's history. The creation of an oral history program at the University of North Alabama would be of particular relevance, not only for the students in the Public History program, but also for the Department of Music and Theatre. At the middle and high school levels, such programs could be created within social studies or history classes with a focus on their specific community. The creation of such programs may be difficult given the existing demands on teaching and testing established curriculum, but it is a concept worthy of further exploration because of its potential benefits to research and interpretation for the MSNHA.

Topics of Greatest Need

There are several aspects of the region's history that need recordation while the participants are still living. Individuals associated with the development of Wilson Dam and TVA projects on the river may be alive and should be interviewed. Many of the Native American stories – both historic and lore - are orally-based and in need of recording. The most accessible oral histories are those associated with the music industry, including the Muscle Shoals recording studios' heyday of the 1970s. Although the music itself may all be safely recorded, the stories behind those recordings need to be captured as well.

3. Create an Educational Curriculum with Public and Private Schools to Teach the MSNHA’s Primary Themes.

It is important for elementary, middle and high school students to have an understanding and appreciation for the history that occurred in the shoals region. Informing students as to the history that formed their communities and region will assist in supporting the future goals and objectives of the MSNHA. The region's public and private schools systems are encouraged to consider the following:

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- Integrate MSNHA's three interpretive themes into curriculum related to American History in the grade schools. Alabama's school systems have varying approaches to teaching history. The first real exposure to history in the public schools comes in the 4th Grade and there is a specific curriculum for teachers and students. This curriculum includes:



Almost all of these themes are relevant to the primary themes and sub-themes of the MSNHA. It is recommended that the MSNHA work with the local school districts to create an expanded curriculum for grade school students that brings local history into the classroom or creates opportunities for field trips. The learning objectives that pertain to the history of the MSNHA should be identified, such as the Civil War, significance of the railroads, and the significance of TVA. As these programs are developed, they should be placed on the MSNHA website and marketed through the In-Service Centers throughout the state, as UNA has one of the centers. The MSNHA should also consult with the Children's Museum of the Shoals to encourage the creation of additional exhibits related to the themes and sub-themes. The museum is a major destination for field trips for 4th graders in the region.



The Children's Museum of the Shoals teaches 4th grade students about Native American life and other themes of the region.

- Develop field trips related to MSNHA's interpretive themes for high-school students. High school students should also be engaged in history and civic projects in the classroom. The Alabama Department of Archives and History has developed the curriculum "Alabama Moments in American History" specifically for the 10th and 11th grades. While this curriculum covers the entire state, teachers in the MSNHA should look for opportunities to use this curriculum with more local hands-on

experiences. Students would benefit from field trips to the area's sites and engaging in living history demonstrations and other interactive activities.

4. Explore the Development of One or More Interpretive Centers for the MSNHA, including Leveraging Existing Facilities.

One of the strategies recommended in the management plan's Strategies section is the development of one or more interpretive centers. Interpretive centers are museums designed to tell a particular story and connected to a specific theme and cultural, historic or natural site. Interpretation centers use different means of communication to enhance the visitor's understanding of heritage. To aid and stimulate the discovery process and the visitor's experience, the main presentation approach tends to be user-friendly and interactive, and often uses exhibitions and multimedia programs. An interpretive center can be a viable solution for effective communication of heritage information in municipalities and rural areas where resources may not exist to establish a traditional, full-scale museum, and where heritage can be an important factor for tourism development. Unlike traditional museums, interpretive centers do not usually aim to collect, conserve and study objects. Instead, they are specialized institutions for communicating the significance and meaning of heritage, although they may still engage in collecting, conserving and studying.

The objective of creating one or more interpretive centers has existed since early in the management planning process for the MSNHA as part of this plan's Foundation Statement. The Strategies, Business and Implementation sections of this plan have examined the opportunities and challenges of creating interpretive centers in the region. Rather than recommend that the MSNHA initiate one or more specific interpretive centers, *the recommendation is a process by which the MSNHA can explore the viability of creating one or more centers, regardless of whether any centers are ultimately built.* Consideration of the creation of interpretive centers should include the following:

- **Explore the Creation of a Native American Heritage Interpretive Center**

While Native American heritage is one of the three major themes of the MSNHA, it is the least researched and interpreted, and it currently provides the visitor with few educational opportunities. Only a few sites have legitimate interpretation and museums, such as the Florence Indian Mound and Museum and the Oakville Indian Mound and Museum, and such facilities have limited effectiveness because of insufficient staffing, expertise, and budgets. Native American artifacts are also on display at some other local museums. The interpretation and presentation of Native American cultures at these locations is inconsistent and can confuse the visitor. There are also challenges to providing proper curation and storage of artifacts.

In order to fully capitalize on the opportunities inherent in this theme, the creation of a Native American Heritage Interpretive Center should be explored. A Native American Heritage Interpretive Center would provide a comprehensive interpretive story of the prehistoric and historic cultures and tribes that resided in the Muscle Shoals region and be a repository of artifacts and curation for the region. The center would orient the visitor to associated sites in the region through interactive panels and exhibits. The center could also be the location for seasonal living history programs as well. The market analysis completed for this management plan identified the Native American theme as the most underserved in the region, but the theme with the greatest potential for increased visitation. A Native American Heritage Interpretive Center could include the following types of exhibits:

Stone tools and artifacts from the Paleoindian Period

The Paleoindian period of 13,000 to 8,500 BC records the earliest era of human occupation in the Muscle Shoals region. Some of the highest concentrations of Paleoindian stone tools have been found in North Alabama and these could be collected and interpreted at the center.

Artifacts from the Archaic Period

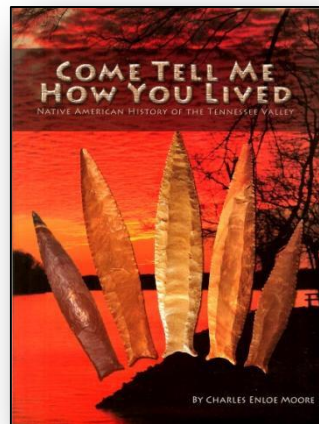
The Archaic period of 8,500 to 1,000 BC brought new diversity of living standards, and the archaeological record of this era is much more diverse than the Paleoindian period. A large number of archaeological sites are found along the Tennessee, Tombigbee, and other Alabama Rivers. Artifacts at these sites indicate a progressive refinement of tools and cookware over the course of human habitation in the region.

Depictions of mound building and cultivation from the Woodland Period

The changes and developments over the Archaic period created more complex cultures, leading archaeologists to define a new epoch known as the Woodland Period, divided into Early, Middle, and Late sub-periods between 1,000 BC to 1,000 AD. Mound building in North Alabama dates to around 1,000 BC and became widespread across eastern North America during the Woodland Period. From AD 500 – 1,000, people of the Late Woodland Period distinguished themselves by an increase in tending crops, including maize and squash.

Depictions and dioramas of villages and everyday life from the Mississippian Period

This period is distinguished by the construction of towns or homesteads, and such settlements occurred in river valleys where fertile bottomlands allowed for corn, bean, squash, and sunflower crops. The rise of a hierarchical cultural structure among Mississippian people created a new dynamic of cooperation and competition among different chiefdoms.



The Native American history of the MSNHA is well-documented in Charles Moore's book entitled "Come Tell Me How You Lived."

Conflict, removal and resettlement in the Historic Period

By the late-1700s, European-American settlers had been drawn westward, establishing permanent settlements in present-day states across the southeast region. This development resulted in friction with the Native American tribes of the region, such as the Creeks and Cherokee. Eventually all of these tribes were removed to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma by the late-1830s in what became known as the "Trail of Tears."

- Explore the Creation of a Music Heritage Interpretive Center

The Muscle Shoals music industry is one of the three major themes of the MSNHA, but there are presently few venues where a visitor can experience and understand the significance of this theme. The Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tusculumbia tells some of this story, but this museum has recurring funding issues and its location is not optimal for leveraging visitation to related sites and for creating economic spin-off benefits. None of the existing sound studios have the space or visitation policies to meet the needs of a Music Heritage Interpretive Center.

A Music Heritage Interpretive Center for the MSNHA would command national and international attention for the Muscle Shoals Sound, the contributions of W.C. Handy, and related artists. Such a center would ideally be located in a downtown area with associated venues such as live music clubs. The center itself should be highly interactive with touch-screens for viewing artists, headphone stations for accessing music, and separate theaters for short movies on artists, songwriting and recording. A recording studio exhibit should be available for visitors, and there should also be consideration to integrating a working recording studio into the center itself. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland is an example of this type of interactive approach for visitors.

Sub-themes and exhibits presented at a Music Heritage Interpretive Center could include the following:

W.C. Handy and the Blues

W.C. Handy, a native of Florence, Alabama, became known as “the Father of the Blues” for his role in elevating essentially a regional folk genre to national recognition. While growing up in Florence, Handy was recognized for his musical abilities and by 1905 he moved to Memphis and formed his own band. Handy was among the first to interpret the raw, organic folk-song form of the blues as an authentic, publishable musical style and his influence on American popular music could be presented through his life’s history and interactive kiosks for listening to his music and the rise of the blues. .

The Recording Industry Takes Root

During the mid-20th century, the “Muscle Shoals Sound” was prominent in American music production and recording. Studios such as FAME helped create a unique combination of blues, rock, country and pop music and promoted the careers of artists like Aretha Franklin, Etta James, and Wilson Pickett. The center could provide a wide variety of interactive exhibits including an actual recording studio display, touch screens for listening to songs, and television footage of performances from different eras. Live musical performances should also be considered such as those at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.



Learning to play the drums is a sample of the types of interactive exhibits that could occur at a Music Heritage Interpretive Center.

- Explore the Creation of a Tennessee River Heritage Interpretive Center

The Tennessee River theme encompasses numerous sub-themes, but the creation of a Tennessee River Heritage Interpretive Center would focus on the importance of the river to Native American history, transportation, industry and the growth and development of the region. This center would also include information on the biological and ecological diversity of the river, as well as its heritage.

Ideally the Tennessee River Heritage Interpretive Center would be located adjacent to the river and with visitor access to view exhibits or interactive panels along the riverbank. The development of a walking trail with kiosks or wayside exhibits along the river would also assist in interpretation. The center should have information on the challenges of river navigation, efforts to tame the river, the construction and building of the Wilson Dam, the coming of TVA, and how the river has affected the growth and development of the region. Sub-themes and exhibits presented at such a center could include:

Agricultural Economy

How the region became a center of the cotton industry, and how this development affected the creation of communities and antebellum plantations. How the river affected trade and the movement of agricultural products.

Civil War

The Tennessee River was of strategic importance to both the Union and Confederacy, and this six-county region changed hands several times during the Civil War. The center could present maps showing troop movements and the clashes that occurred in the region. The center could also depict civilian life during occupation and the enlistment of former slaves into the Union Army. There

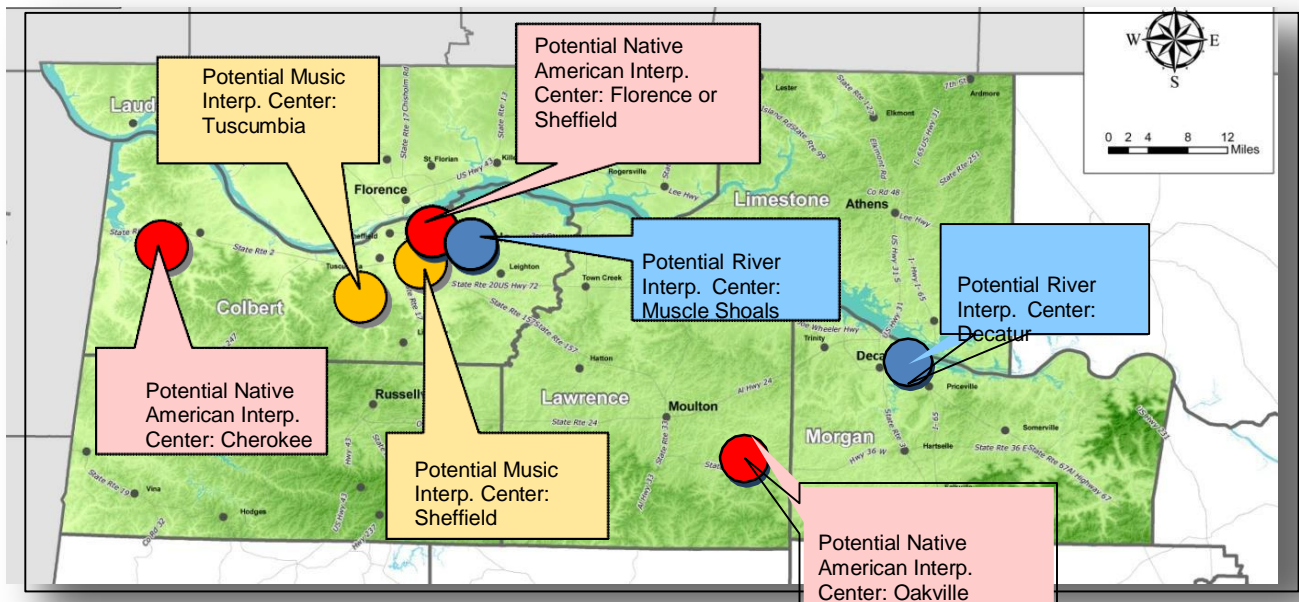
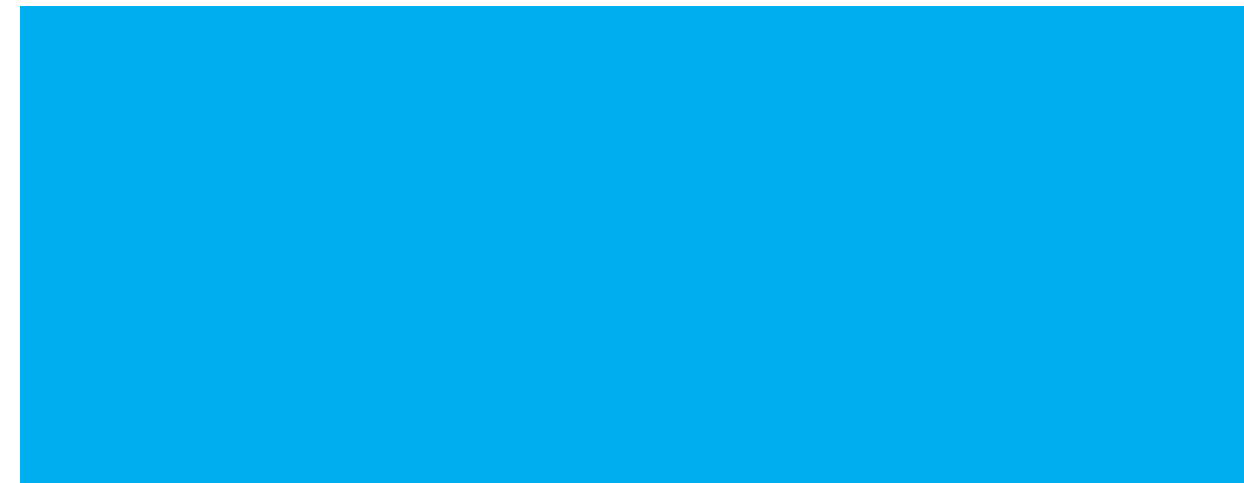
would also be opportunities for living history demonstrations, such as cannon and rifle firing and camp life.

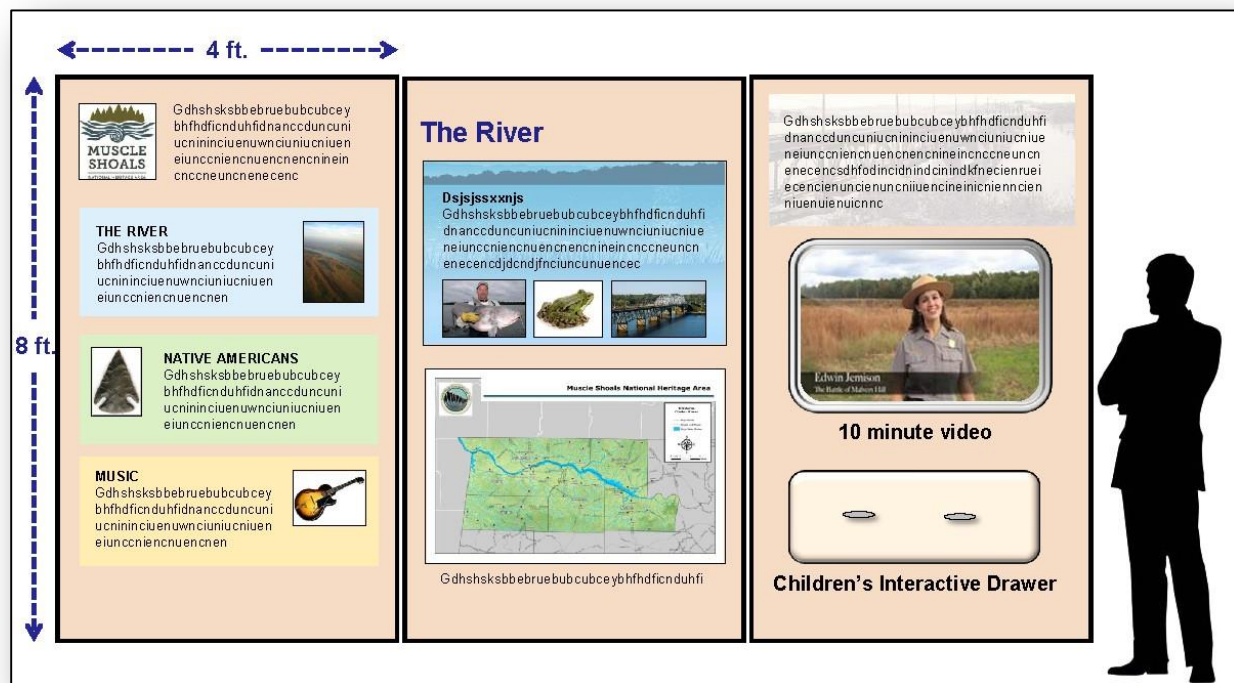
Community Development

The presence of the shoals of the Tennessee River helped to influence the growth of towns such as Tuscumbia, Florence, and Decatur, while others were formed as county governmental and commercial centers. Exhibits could focus on the importance of the river to commercial development and industry, and how the region was transformed after World War II.

Industry & Hydroelectric Development

The shoals of the Tennessee River were a major impediment to river transportation in the 19th century. The construction of a hydroelectric dam at Muscle Shoals was proposed in 1898, but not completed by the federal government until World War I. Additional dams were built on the river by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the 1930s. The center would partner with the TVA to present the importance of hydroelectric power to the region, and how dams and powerhouses work.





Among the cost-effective approaches that might be used lieu of the development of new interpretive centers is to install interpretive panels in existing facilities. This mock-up at illustrates a potential design.

- Explore the Creation of a Transportation Museum at the Southern Railway Depot in Decatur
Transportation is a key sub-theme in the MSNHA for the broader River theme and the growth and development of the railroad plays a major role in community development. The Southern Railway Depot in Decatur was built in 1904 and is currently vacant. The City of Decatur has proposed adaptive re-use plans for the building and a museum is one of the uses under consideration.

If plans for a museum move forward, the theme of regional transportation should be a key part of the building's interpretation. The adaptive reuse of the depot would assist in bringing more visitors to this section of Decatur and enhance the businesses along adjacent Bank Street and the Old Town Historic District. Exhibits at a transportation museum could include displays and maps of the Natchez Trace, the Tuscumbia, Courtland & Decatur Railroad, the rise of the railroad industry in the region, and the construction of the modern highway system.



A Transportation Museum is one of the proposals for the Southern Railway Depot in Decatur.

5. Develop a Series of Theme-based Tours for Walking, Cycling and Driving.

Many of the MSNHA communities have already developed theme-based tours that are described in the previous section. The MSNHA should support the creation of additional theme-based tours, including the following:

- Create Tours Based on the Three Primary Themes and Relevant Sub-Themes

The three primary themes of Native American Heritage, the Tennessee River and Music are represented by many sites across the region. Some of these are within existing walking and driving tours, while others are not connected in any way. As part of this management plan, tour routes have been proposed for each theme and several sub-themes, and these are located in Appendix B of this Interpretive Plan. Nevertheless, below is a brief overview of each:

Native American Theme Tour

This theme is the least cohesive and interpreted across the MSNHA. The creation of a Native American Heritage Interpretive Center is one way to address this deficiency, but there should also be the development of a Native American driving tour to connect sites such as the Oakville Indian Mound Museum and Park and the Florence Indian Mound and Museum. While many Native American archaeological sites are restricted to the public, these can be noted with roadside markers or wayside exhibits in the general vicinity without pinpointing their locations. For example, the LaGrange Rock Shelter near Leighton could be interpreted at the nearby LaGrange College Site Park. Another example is the Seven Mile Island Archaeological District along the Tennessee River, which is also a restricted location. The Seven Mile Island Wildlife Area is open to hunters and managed by TVA and provides opportunities for the installation of wayside exhibits. Other sites, such as the Five-Oaks Spring in Russellville, are more readily accessible and there are several nearby locations in the downtown area where interpretive information could be placed.

Tennessee River Theme Tour

This interpretive theme has several sub-themes, and tours have been created for the Civil War, Transportation, Community Neighborhoods and Community Downtowns topics. These tours are intended to reach heritage tourists who have an interest in targeted aspects of the region's history and architecture. For example the historic route of the Tuscumbia, Courtland & Decatur Railroad is one of the routes of the Trail of Tears, and numerous historic sites still exist along this active railroad. The western section of the railroad bed through Tuscumbia has been abandoned, but the original right-of-way follows some city streets before it terminates at Tuscumbia Landing. This 45-mile corridor could potentially be utilized for a greenway, while still accommodating the current railroad use where it exists.

Music Theme Tour

This theme should include some form of access to the Shoals area recording studios, particularly FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio (3614 Jackson Highway). Tours of the individual active studios would need to be designed to not interfere with the business conducted at the studios, such as through glass viewing areas and building additions with interpretive and historical materials. A small shuttle bus could be run by the AMHOF (or subsequently established music interpretive center) to circulate amongst the various studios and related sites at regular intervals.



The former Muscle Shoals Sound Studio would be a "must-see site" for any music-themed tour in the MSNHA.

- Integrate the Music Theme Tour with the Proposed Roots of American Music Trail
The proposed Roots of America Music Trail is an effort sponsored by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments. This proposed trail would link Nashville and the MSNHA along the Natchez Trace Parkway. This proposal should be expanded to create a triangular route to Memphis in order to enhance interpretive sites, marketing strategies, and recruitment of tour companies. This tour would form a triangle linking Memphis, Nashville and Muscle Shoals, along with important sites in-between or nearby, including Tupelo and Clarksdale in Mississippi. A link could even be extended to New Orleans.

The tour would be marketed through bus tour companies, but also for self-driving, biking, and motorcyclists. Even though much of this tour is outside the MSNHA, it connects with the type of heritage tourist who is exploring the musical roots of the South and the nation. The Muscle Shoals Sound is an integral part of the mixture of country, rock, and blues which emerged from Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee in the 20th century.



- Create Thematic Brochures to Link to Walking and Driving Tours
The MSNHA has a wide variety of existing walking and driving tours of downtown and neighborhood historic districts, Civil War sites, churches and music venues. These are available at various tourist centers and provide the visitor with a range of options. However, specific brochures should be developed to enable the visitor to identify which tours are available by theme or sub-theme throughout the MSNHA. Appendix ? lists the walking and driving tour brochures available in the region and which should be incorporated into thematic brochures.

- Expand Walking Tours and Interpretation to Additional Communities
Several communities in the MSNHA have historic resources that have yet to be addressed in any way to interest the visitor. Russellville contains potential historic districts in its downtown and older residential area. The Roxy Theater in particular is a notable architectural resource in the city. The development of a walking tour to highlight the city's heritage is recommended. More informative walking tours should also be developed for Hartselle, Sheffield and Moulton.

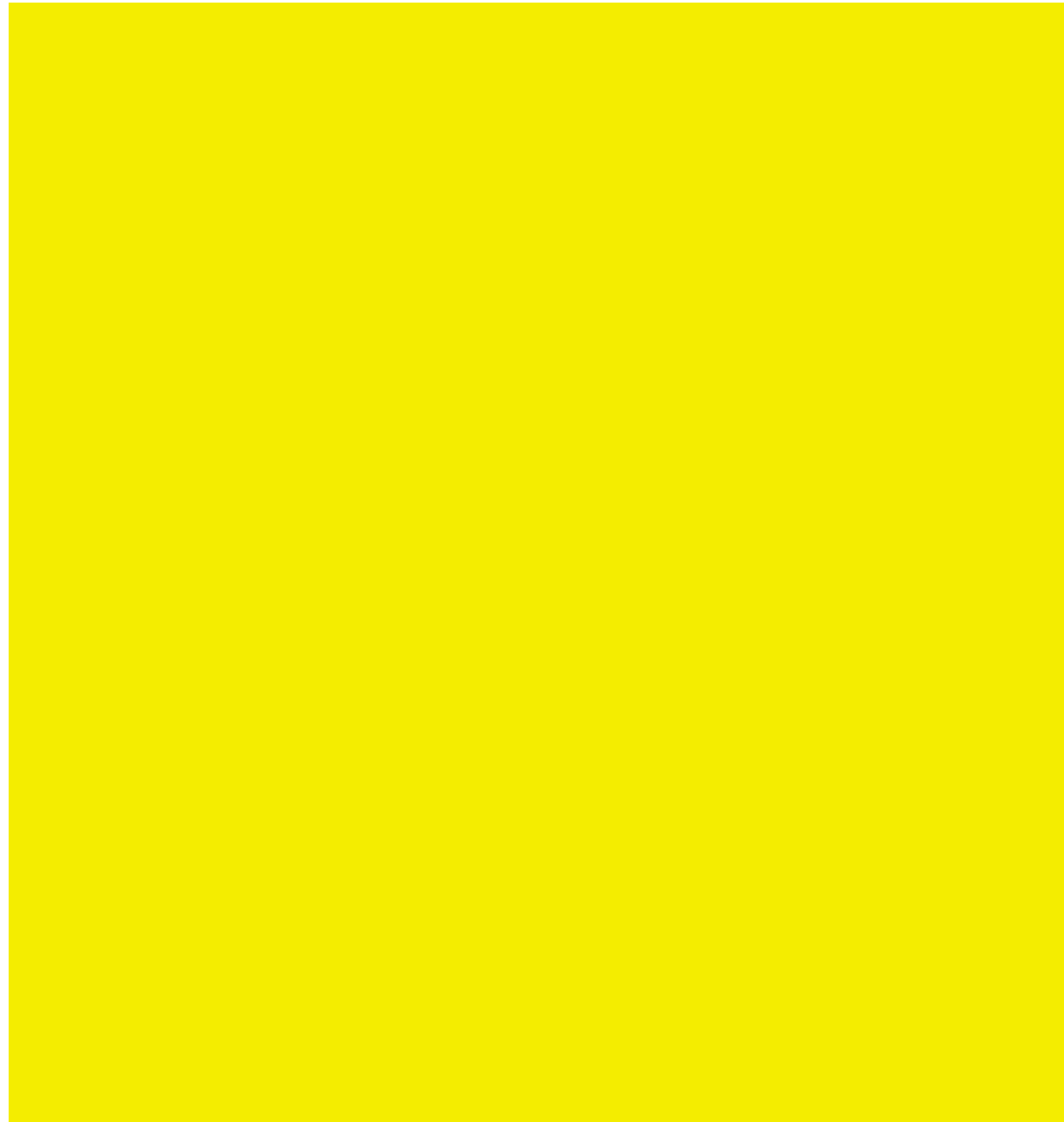


The Roxy Theater is an excellent example of the Art Moderne style and should be part of a downtown walking tour of Russellville.

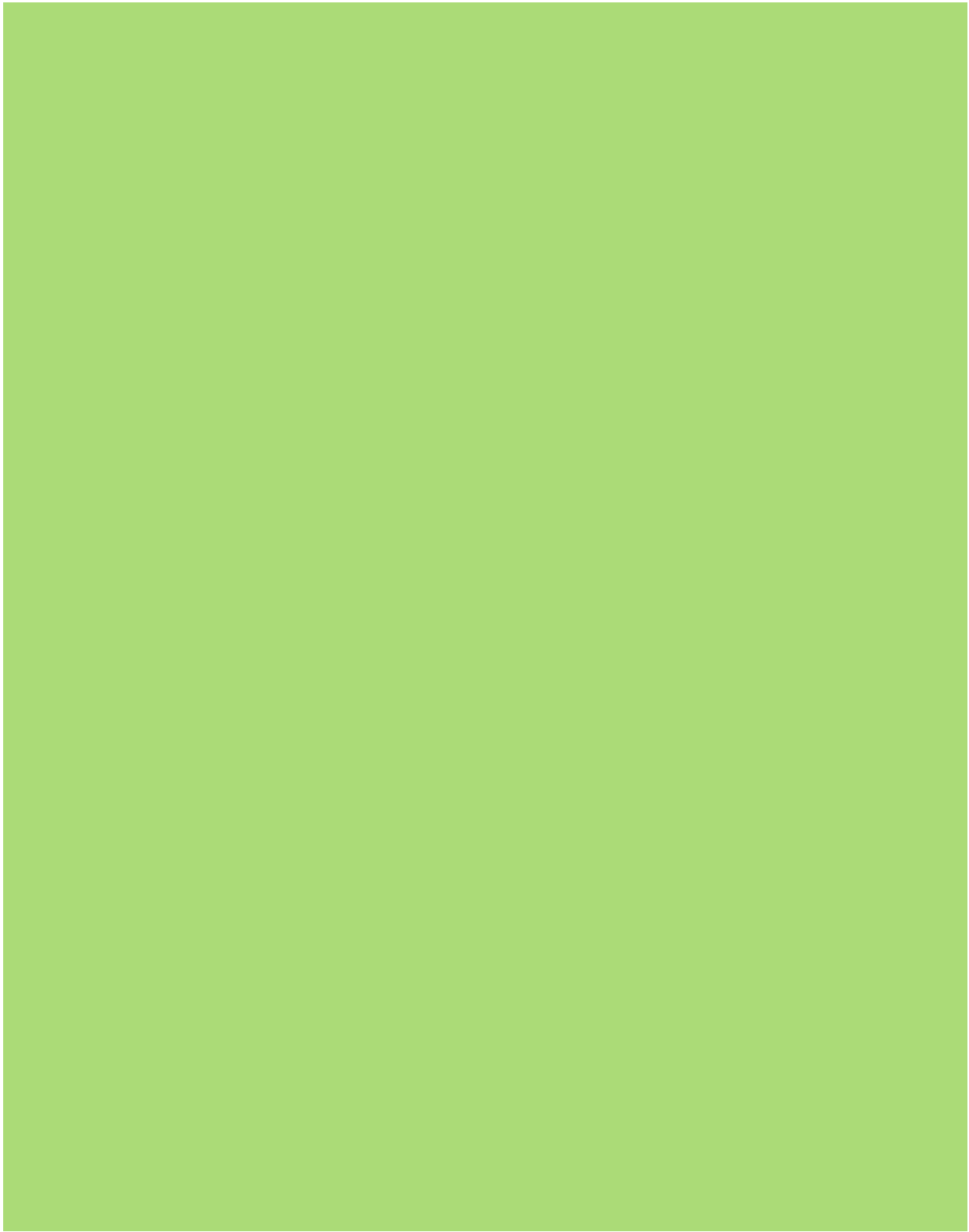
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- Create a Consistent and Theme Based Wayside Exhibit Program
The cultural and historic sites in the MSNHA display a wide variety of existing wayside exhibit designs. Some of these are kiosk forms, while others are traditional pole-mounted designs. The creation of a consistent design featuring the MSNHA logo would assist in identification and branding of the region. Creation of a standardized design would also be an economical approach in the manufacturing process.



This wayside exhibit in Decatur reflects the design and materials of similar wayside exhibits in the region.



- Access and Interpret the Florence Civil War Earthworks
On the south bank of the Tennessee River overlooking Florence are a series of earthworks constructed to defend the city during the Civil War. These earthworks have been studied and mapped by archaeologists, but are currently not accessible on TVA property. The MSNHA should consult with TVA to identify methods for accessing and interpreting these earthworks. Ideally, the public would have a designated parking area and walking trails to visit these earthworks and view wayside exhibits. If security considerations prohibit accessing the property, a virtual tour should be created for the public and placed at visitor centers and museums.



- Enhance Interpretation: Nitrate Village No. 1
Nitrate Village No. 1 is a significant resource in the industrial and hydroelectric heritage of the shoals. A historic marker is at this location, but the village is difficult to find and there is minimal directional signage for the visitor. Wayside interpretation is needed to emphasize the importance of Wilson Dam's construction and the federal government's approach to provide housing for its workers. The village is also architecturally significant, and a walking tour should be developed so visitors can view each of the standardized plans for the houses and school.



Nitrate Village No. 1 should have more directional signage and a walking tour.

6. Create a Series of Educational and Interpretive Materials Telling the MSNHA's Story

City and county governments, as well as non-profit organizations, have already developed a wide variety of educational and interpretive materials for the region. These materials include walking and driving tours, wayside exhibits, historic markers and informative brochures. These existing methods and materials should be enhanced in coming years with support by the MSNHA. The use of new telecommunication devices should be a part of any new interpretive programs to inform the visitor and connect with other theme-based sites. Recommendations under this goal include:

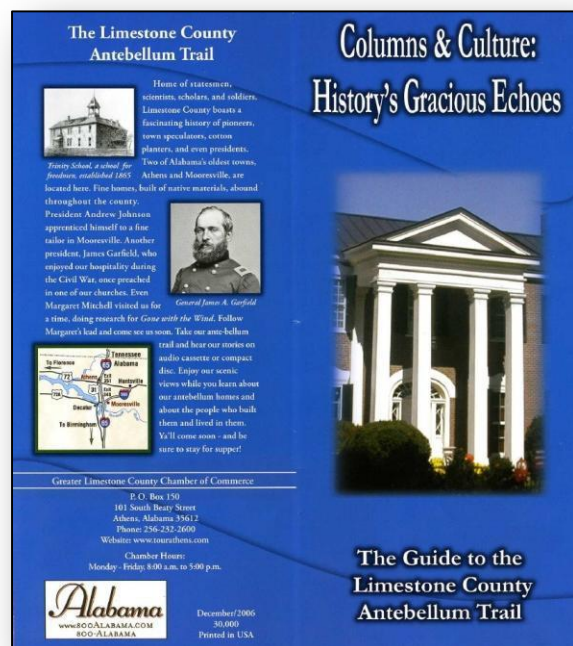
- Create and Distribute One or More Brochures for the MSNHA
A key component for providing basic interpretation and links to the region's historic and cultural sites would be through a MSNHA brochure. It is recommended that one brochure would be about the MSNHA in general, but focusing primarily on the themes and sites, attractions and events. There could also be three supplemental brochures, each focusing on one of the three themes of the heritage area. Once developed, they should be provided in brochure racks at all regional visitors centers, at partner sites, and at relevant hotels and restaurants. A digital version of each brochure should also be downloadable on the MSNHA website.
- Revise the MSNHA Website With Consistent Interpretive Information
One of the first actions a potential visitor to the shoals region may take is to go to the MSNHA website to view the historic and cultural opportunities. The website currently has an "Explore Heritage" option to click on which is inconsistent with the themes and sub-themes presented in this management plan. This information should be reformatted to address the three key themes and the sub-themes within the plan. Within the sub-themes there should be expanded links to take visitors to specific themes and existing tours, such as those for Civil War sites and community historic districts.
- Increase the Linkage of the MSNHA Brand
Visitors should be able to obtain consistent and easy to access information about the MSNHA region as they plan their trips. Information should tell visitors what there is to see and do, help them coordinate available activities with their personal interests and schedules, and direct them to additional information on the region, attractions, and services. The MSNHA should be the "brand" by which northwest Alabama is known. Branding includes the use of consistent graphic images, such as logos, based on the Native American, Tennessee River and Music themes. As these graphic images are used, prospective visitors will gain a greater identification of the MSNHA with this region. Prospective visitors will start searching for materials on the MSNHA, and will recognize it when they start planning trips. The six-county websites should all have consistent graphic images and linkages to connect the web site visitor with the MSNHA and its tourism and interpretive opportunities.

- Improve the Linkage Between Historic, Cultural and Recreational Attractions
Many of the region's historic, cultural and recreational attractions operate independently of one another and do not have information linking the site with the MSNHA or opportunities to explore similar venues. By expanding interpretive programming, visitors will be better able to seek out multiple venues for interpretation. At a variety of locations, visitors should have opportunities to learn about the three major interpretive themes and how to access associated sites. Each site should continue to provide visitors with interpretation specific to their sites, but should also develop interpretation that ties their sites to other attractions and to the MSNHA as a whole. Each site should demonstrate how its interpretive story fits into the overall interpretive context of the MSNHA.
- Utilize a Variety of Media for Interpretation of Theme-Based Tours

Maps & Brochures

Despite recent technological advances, maps and brochures remain an important part of interpretation, especially to the older heritage tourist who may not utilize the internet or related media for information. Most brochures for existing tour routes in the MSNHA include a map. Such maps typically use symbols to identify sites, and those symbols are coordinated with associated text about the sites within the brochure. Brochures of this type for the tour routes proposed above should be available on the MSNHA's website in a digital format that can be accessed by computers and cell phones, as well as in a downloadable format (PDF) that can then be printed and used as a hard copy.

An example of this type of brochure is the Greater Limestone County Chamber of Commerce's "Columns and Culture: History's Gracious Echoes." The brochure (right) promotes a driving tour of the county's antebellum house trail. It includes photographs of sites along the trail and keys them to maps, as well as an accompanying audio cassette or CD. Several introductory pages describe the founding of antebellum towns, the importance of cotton to the local and regional economy, and the spatial arrangements of the typical plantation, including the planter's home, fields, orchards, outbuildings, and slave quarters. This information is useful for helping the visitor to envision the full complex of once-isolated, vast plantations, as often these properties have, over time, been partitioned and have lost the outbuildings crucial to their operation. The brochure also notes that planters built town homes, also with attendant outbuildings such as stables, chicken coops, and kitchens, in Athens and Mooresville. The maps of the brochure have directional arrows to guide the tourist around these two towns and in between. The maps also note several stops open to the public, where visitors may acquire further promotional information.

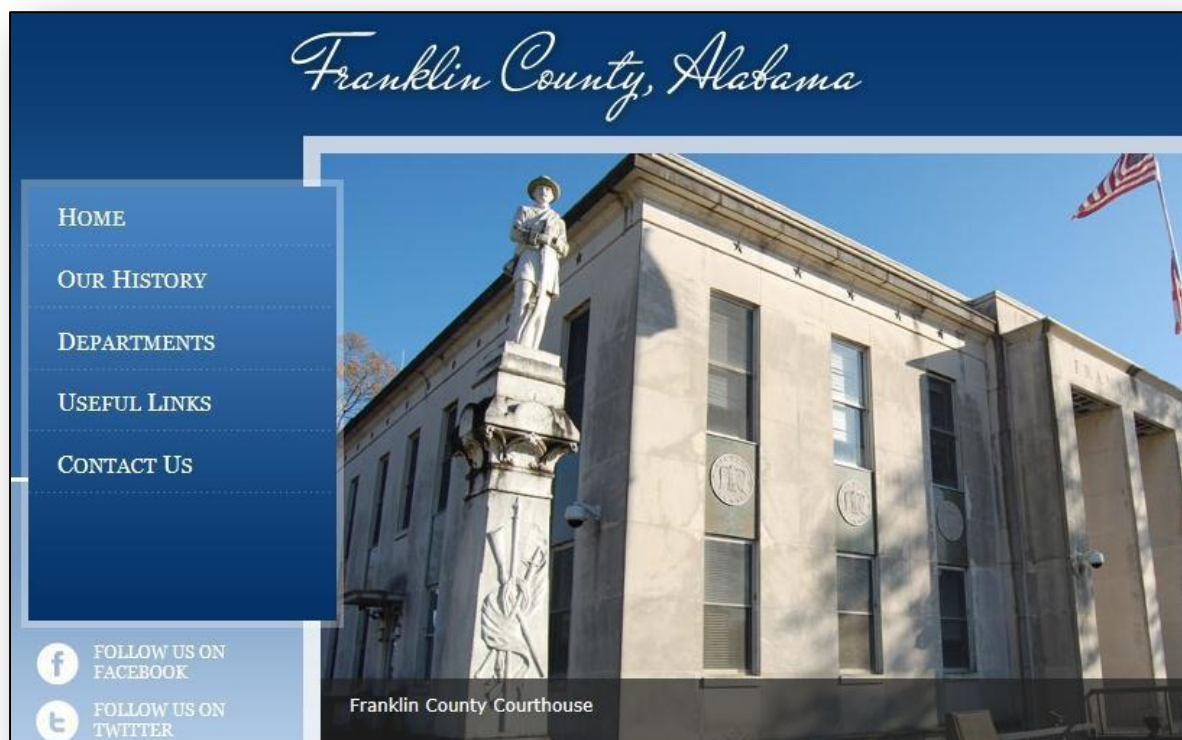


Limestone County's "Columns & Culture" brochure is a good example of an informative guide for visitors interested in ante-bellum homes.

Internet Resources & Web Pages

Approximately 90 million American adults use the internet each year to plan their travel, which makes it one of the most important ways to highlight the attractions of the MSNHA. Each county within the Heritage Area has its own website and these generally direct viewers to pertinent local government information. The website should also serve as a portal to connect with the MSNHA and historic and cultural sites in the county. The website for Franklin County, for example, is cleanly organized with

basic tabs: Departments; History; Useful Links. The history page introduces the viewer to the important events of the past that shaped the county and influenced its development. The links page provides the viewer with hyperlinks to the websites of area attractions, such as the Red Bay Museum, a resource of the music heritage theme in the heritage area. Each county website should be revised to include links to the MSNHA and be consistent with overall information and marketing. City web sites, such as those for Florence and Decatur, should be restructured as well with the same consistent information and message.



Franklin County's existing website has a tab for both history and useful links.

Telecommunications Tools

There are a variety of telecommunications technologies that can be used for interpretation as well, and these are expected to become even more user-friendly in the years to come. Examples of telecommunications tools that should be considered for the thematic tours include cell phone audio interpretation, cell phone apps and QR Codes.

Cell Phone Audio Interpretation

Wayside exhibits, brochures and historic markers are now being created that have a call-in phone number at the site that is being interpreted. The viewer calls the number and gets an audio message as they are standing at the site. This approach would be particularly applicable for the Civil War tour and for tours of properties in the downtown area and neighborhoods.



The Franklin (TN) Parks Department celebrated the launch of its cell phone audio tour of the Franklin Battlefield in 2012.

Cell Phone Apps

A cell phone app, sometimes called a mobile app, is any cell phone application, particularly those that are directly purchased and installed by phone users. These are Smartphone add-ons that perform functions other than making a phone call. The term "app" can be used to refer to any application for any device, but when used alone, it most commonly refers to software downloaded onto cell phones. An example of how apps can be used to interpret historic sites is Boston's Freedom Trail, which has 16 marked historical sites. This app has a written explanation, as well as a professional-quality audio and HD video component. There is also a map feature providing the viewer with specific directions along this walking trail.



The History Channel is one of many businesses and organizations that have developed historical tour applications for cell phones.

QR Codes

QR codes, which is an abbreviation for "Quick Response Codes," is the trademark for a type of matrix barcode (or two-dimensional code). This system has become popular due to its fast readability and large storage capacity compared to standard barcodes. The code consists of black modules (square dots) arranged in a square pattern on a white background. For historic interpretation, QR codes are linked to telecommunications resources that provide the same type of interpretive experiences (audio and video) described above for apps.

- Create Links with the State's Historic Marker Program

Another way to connect potential visitors to MSNHA resources via the Internet is through the Alabama Historical Commission's database of historical markers, available at the Commission's website. The database is organized alphabetically by county and provides a full-text list of markers. Many of the AHC's markers go beyond basic presentation of historical facts and include some degree of interpretation. The text often illustrates a resource's connection with a theme or sub-theme of the heritage area, such as Native American history or transportation, and explains the resource's significance. For example, at Courtland in Lawrence County, several historical markers explain how this small town, not the county seat, gained such importance during the nineteenth century.



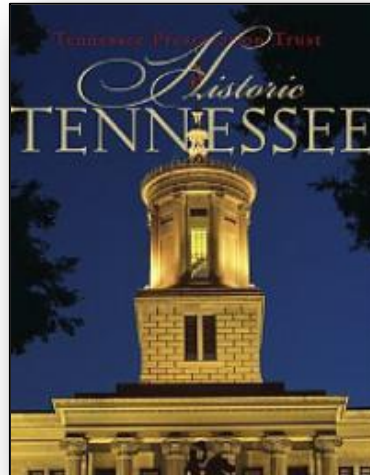
Links to the Alabama Historical Commission's website would help the visitor access the region's historic markers.

The Alabama Historical Association maintains a similar website of historical markers that it has sponsored, available at its website. The website is also organized by county and provides a full-text list of markers. These markers are similar in content and interpretive information to the AHC's program. The AHC and the AHA marker database website links should accompany the link to the Alabama Register at all the county websites.

- Develop a “coffee-table” presentation-style book.

To more fully tell the story of the MSNHA and to create a highly visible and marketable product, the writing and publication of a “coffee-table” book should be considered.

These types of publications are usually written by one or more local authors and are highly illustrated with maps and photographs. These types of publications are often underwritten by private companies or individuals and are intended to be marketing tools and sources of income, as well as part of “branding” for the sponsor. To create such a book, it is recommended that the MSNHA be the sponsoring organization and partner with the University of North Alabama’s new Public History program to draft the text and secure historic photographs and similar graphics.



“Coffee table” type books are produced by non-profit agencies for fund raising and promotions.

- Improve the Interpretation of the Trail of Tears

The removal of the region’s Native American tribes on the “Trail of Tears” was a significant part of the area’s 19th century heritage. Throughout the region there are a number of sites associated with Indian Removal, and the National Park Service has an on-going certification program for eligible sites. Interpretive planning is currently underway for Tuscumbia Landing, which was a significant departure point for the Cherokee on their journey west. Another potential site for enhanced interpretation is Rhodes Ferry Park in Decatur, which is directly across the river from a campsite used by the Cherokee as they traveled down the Tennessee River. The proposed transportation museum in Decatur is another location for interpretation of this story since hundreds of Cherokee traveled by rail from Decatur to Tuscumbia. The MSNHA should continue to work with the National Park Service to recognize, certify and interpret Trail of Tears heritage sites in the region.

- Enhance Interpretation through designation programs such as “visitor ready” and “emerging.”

Visitors to the MSNHA need to have the best experience possible when experiencing historic and cultural sites. This includes getting a clear understanding of the site’s story through the interpretive message. There are large variations in the quality and accuracy of the existing interpretation at sites throughout the heritage area. The creation of a best practices program would promote improving the quality of interpretation and help ensure that visitors are not disappointed by their experience. These standards would determine visitor readiness in areas such as wayfinding, historic authenticity and integrity, and accurate and effective interpretation. Sites that meet the standards should be formally deemed “visitor ready” and, thereby, receive full promotion benefits from the MSNHA. Similarly, for those sites that have existing deficiencies in interpretation, a program for “emerging” sites should be created. Such a program would assist owners and operators to achieve visitor readiness status through technical assistance provided by the MSNHA. Details of this program (standards to use, committees to apply them, etc.) are addressed in this management plan’s Interpretation Plan.

7. Program Sites and Attractions Throughout the MSNHA with Regular or Periodic Living History Demonstrations and Events

Living history is any of various activities involving the re-enactment of historical events or the recreation of living conditions of the past. It refers to a method of interpreting the past through the use of a person or persons dressed in period clothing. The technique is usually enhanced by having the person or persons use period tools and engage in period activities. There are several national organizations that are available to provide assistance in the formulation and planning for living history demonstrations. These groups include the Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, which serves those involved in living historical farms, agricultural museums and outdoor museums of history and folklife. Another group is the Living History Association (LHA), which provides assistance with reenactment groups and museums across the country. Recommendations for the MSNHA include:

- Program the MSNHA with Living History Demonstrations at Various Key Sites

The following demonstration types might occur at the following sites tied to the MSNHA's three primary interpretive themes:

Native American Demonstrations

At the Oakville Indian Mounds there are already a series of living history events. For example, about 15,000 people attended the 2012 Multicultural Indian Event, an annual festival held in May and sponsored by the Lawrence County Native American Student Club. Native crafts and customs were demonstrated through flint-knapping, silversmithing, finger-weaving, gorget-making, stickball, drum-making, woodcarving, blacksmithing, basket making, pottery-making, stone pipe-making and more. These types of activities should be expanded as often as possible at the Oakville Indian Mounds and at other Native American sites in the region. Living history should also be a key component of any potential new Native American Heritage Interpretive Center.

Tennessee River Demonstrations

The Tennessee River theme has numerous sub-themes that lend themselves to living history and reenactment events. For example,

Civil War demonstrations (camp life, firing long arms and artillery, etc.) could occur at locations such as Fort Henderson in Athens and Decatur where Union troops were stationed. The privately-owned Sweetwater Plantation near Florence features living history demonstrations of cooking, canning and other domestic duties of the 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the living history programs includes Civil War reenactments and camp life for Union and Confederate soldiers.

Music Demonstrations

Activities related to song writing, playing music, and recording music should occur at a Music Interpretive Center if one should be established. Such programs could be modeled after the existing interactive exhibits at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland and, closer to home, the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tuscumbia (see photo below).



Ceremonial dances are one of the living history exhibitions at the Oakville Indian Mounds.



Visitors are able to sing along with the stars at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.

- Program the MSNHA with Living History Demonstrations at Various Events
There are numerous events and festivals held each year in the MSNHA and these have many opportunities to incorporate living history for the audience. For example, the Alabama Chicken and Egg Festival in Moulton which attracts 15,000 visitors could be a venue for exhibiting farm life in the 1800s and poultry raising practices of the past. Opportunities for living history would include the events such as the creation of public access and interpretation at Tuscumbia Landing or the Confederate Earthworks at Florence. Another opportunity currently under consideration is a program related to the 150th anniversary of Confederate General John Bell Hood's march through the region in the fall of 1864. The MSNHA staff should create a roster of those who perform living history in the region and work with festival venues to include these types of living history demonstrations as often as possible.