



State Council Spotlight

Tennessee Council for History Education

Paraphrasing the letter from Abigail Adams to her son, David McCullough challenged teachers at the recent Tennessee Council for History Education (TNCHE) Conference that it would be unpardonable for us to turn out students who are historical blockheads. He went on to say that we must do a better job of helping our students learn history, a subject so important because of what it teaches us about leadership, the ability to deal with failure, and the realization that people in the past never knew how things were going to turn out.

Piggybacking on NCHE Board member McCullough's unparalleled delivery on "Leadership and the History You Don't Know" on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, the TNCHE held its inaugural conference by first attending his lecture, and then following that with 19 breakout sessions focused on state, national, and world history. The format for the TNCHE Conference was new and refreshing:

- a) evening keynote on MTSU campus, followed by a McCullough book-signing;
- b) overnight at the Doubletree Hotel in Murfreesboro, where the next morning a sumptuous buffet breakfast with hot entrees got conference participants off to a good start; and
- c) breakout sessions of about an hour each, 3 or 4 concurrent ones over 5 periods, ending at 1:20 p.m. so that teachers could make it back home in time for dinner (many came to Middle Tennessee from as far away as Memphis or a six-hour drive from the extreme eastern part of the state in Johnson County), or if they were from the Metro Nashville area they still had time in the afternoon to visit a local historic site or art gallery--Metro Nashville has lots of Civil War and other historic sites.

Breakout sessions were particularly appealing because they were designed for all three clusters: elementary, middle, and high school.

There were sessions on Middle Eastern and Islamic History, as well as Latin America in History Education for those who teach World History. Sessions on historical resources featured the National Archives' South East region (the speaker came to TN from her GA headquarters); the TN State Library and Archives; the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (the speaker flew in from GLI headquarters in New York City); the TN State Museum; and the TN Holocaust Commission; to name only a few.

Teachers gave high marks to sessions on programs from Conner Prairie, Indiana; the nearby Sequoyah Birthplace Museum; and the Fort Loudon Historic site of the French and Indian War. History Professor Michael Birdwell (TN Tech) showed that there is much more to WWI hero Sergeant Alvin York than portrayed by Gary Cooper in the 1941 movie. In another breakout, Bill Carey, founder of the TN History for Kids website, talked about the lessons he learned while attempting to deliver online history content for Grades K-12.

Some organizational notes for NCHE State Coordinators:

- 1) Todd Wigginton, NCHE State Coordinator for TN, worked with several other Teaching American History grant project directors from around the state to put

together the conference, both program-wise and financially.

- 2) Todd and his assistant, Rebecca Verner, have put together a model for establishing a state executive board: each section of the state (TN is naturally divided into middle, eastern, and western regions) has one member on the TNCHE Board who is a classroom teacher, one who is a public historian, and one an academic historian.

- 3) At the Board meeting after the Conference, members reviewed evaluations from conference participants and selected officers for the upcoming year. Seth Stewart is President, Martha Church is Secretary, Todd Wigginton will remain as State Coordinator, and Becky Verner will continue as Treasurer and event coordinator. MTSU's History Department will continue to help out; this year it will be in the form of web space for TNCHE. Plans are already under way for next year's conference!

Todd and Becky and the entire TNCHE Board should be proud: over 100 people attended this inaugural conference, everyone increased their historical knowledge and there were no blockheads to be seen anywhere.

Written by Elaine Reed, Executive Director NCHE



(l. to r.) Elaine Reed, NCHE Executive Director, with David McCullough, TNCHE Keynoter, and Prof., Jan Leone from the host institution's History Department at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro