

Connecticut League of Museums

2025 Annual Conference Preliminary Schedule

Monday, June 2, 2025, Willard-DiLoreto Hall, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain

Schedule at a Glance

7:00	Exhibitor Setup
8:00	Registration and Coffee/Pastries in Museum Marketplace (Atrium)
8:45	Welcome and Annual Business Meeting of the Membership (Lecture Hall)
9:15	Coffee Break
9:30	Breakout Session 1
10:30	Coffee Break
11:00	Breakout Session 2
12:00	Lunch
1:00	Keynote (Torp Theater, Davidson Hall)
1:45	Coffee Break
2:00	Breakout Session 3
3:00	Break w/ Snacks & Coffee
3:30	Breakout Session 4
4:30	Prize Drawing (Atrium)
5:00	Off-Site Happy Hour (Five Churches Brewing)

Schedule of Breakout Sessions with Descriptions

Breakout Session 1 (9:30–10:30)

Session 1A

Exploring Nature in our Neighborhoods

Mary Pelletier, Director, and Secretary, Park Watershed

Dyna Chhem, Student, Trinity College

Jana Colancino, Assistant Site Administrator, North Central Region, Connecticut Landmarks

Kate Reamer, Connecticut Audubon Society

Brief presentations will review how to involve groups interested in the nature of Connecticut's cultural heritage. Successful community engagement programs, such as forest walks, Olmsted inquiries, mapping, and birding activities, will be noted. Presentations will invite open discussion

of opportunities and issues surrounding programs that explore how the past, present and future of Connecticut's nature strengthens communities.

Session 1B

Tabletop Disasters: Are you ready for an Emergency?

Jodi Polsgrove, Curator of Collections, DECD/SHPO Museums

Beth Burgess, Collections Curator, Museum of Connecticut History / CT State Library

*Kathy Craughwell-Varda, Director of Conservation ConneCTion/Museum Consultant,
Conservation ConneCTion / CT State Library*

Do you know what to do in the event of an emergency at your museum? Will your community be ready? Join us as we practice for a real emergency, using actual sample events! No fire, water or other hazards will be used, but you will learn if you really are prepared for an emergency!

Session 1C

From Chaos to Calm: Three Proven Strategies for Busy Museum Professionals

Jennifer Reynolds-Kaye, Director, Housatonic Museum of Art

Feeling overwhelmed by emails, meetings, and information overload? Struggling to get the important work done and feeling exhausted? Then this is the session for you! Learn from the director of a small museum about her tried-and-true time management and workflow strategies that have transformed her work life.

Session 1D

Tapping into the Stories of Visitors and the Semiquincentennial

Jean McGavin, Founder, History Chip

One of the central themes of America 250 is the collection of stories of a vast spectrum of Americans. This roundtable will explore ways that storytelling by visitors to participants' venues can enhance the visitors' experience and their understanding and appreciation of history, as well as their personal connection with the past. How do we encourage and foster storytelling by these visitors? How can History Chip best participate in that collection of stories? These stories foster resilience and recognition of the value of the visitors' lives and enhance their engagement with the institution.

Session 1E

Importance of Storytelling in Higher Education

Abigail Cowan, Community History Project Assistant, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History

Lyle Cairdeas, Community History Project Manager, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History

Cinthia Zuniga, Community History Project Assistant, Connecticut Museum of Culture and History

Rebecca Boncoddio, Associate Professor of Psychological Science, Central Connecticut State University

Join us for "The Importance of Storytelling in Higher Education," where we explore the transformative power of oral history in the classroom. Led by the Community History Project at the Connecticut Museum, this session will reveal how weaving personal stories from Connecticut residents into curricula creates a dynamic learning environment.

Breakout Session 2 (11:00–12:00)

Session 2A

Reduce, Reuse, Rehabilitate: How to Enhance the Energy Efficiency of Historic Buildings

Stacey Vairo, Circuit Rider, Preservation CT

Marena Wisniewski, State Register Coordinator, State Historic Preservation Office

There is a myth that historic preservation and energy efficiency are opposed, but many historic houses are inherently sustainable and preserving a historic structure is the ultimate form of reducing environmental waste. But it's not all easy – and there can be some drawbacks. Making manageable upgrades to your historic building can often result in significant rewards. As stewards of historic buildings – whether you operate a small house museum or former industrial space, there are ways to utilize both these inherent aspects of historic building practices and new technologies to lower your impact on the environment AND retain the character defining features of your property.

Session 2B

Curating Caution: When Your Collection Could Kill You

Christine Pittsley, Special Projects Curator, Museum of CT History

Alex MacKenzie, Curator, Springfield Armory National Historic Site

Tara Kennedy, Head of Preventive Conservation, Yale Library Center for Preservation and Conservation

Museums have some pretty unique and sometimes dangerous items. From a German grenade from World War I to a historic firearm found in Grandpa's attic, or even a great-grandmother's green dress that's loaded with arsenic, handling and caring for these special treasures can be

tricky. We'll take a look at identifying hazards in your collections and share some tips on how to handle these unique items safely.

Session 2C

Working with Connecticut's Tribes

Becky Vitkauskas, Grants Officer, CT Humanities

Ruth Garby Torres (Schaghticoke), Tribal Community Member-in-Residence/Student

Engagement Specialist, Brown University

endawnis spears, (Diné/Ojibwe/Chickasaw/Choctaw), Practitioner in Residence for Tribal

Engagement, Brown University and Co-Founder, Akomawt Educational Initiative

Join CT Humanities and our Indigenous partners to learn about best practices for collaborating with CT's tribal community. This session will help attendees understand how to develop relationships with CT's five state-recognized Tribes, why doing this work is important, and how to lay successful foundations toward collaborative work and programming.

Session 2D

Museum Educator's Workshop

Melissa Houston, Director of Education & Interpretation, Greenwich Historical Society

Irene Norman, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction, Institute for American Indian Studies

Nick Villagra, STEM Engagement & Learning Specialist, Connecticut Science Center

The session will feature three unique museums and some of the new methods they are using to engage learners. Each will present ideas, activities, and methods they have used and can be adapted for use at other museums. Following the presentations, attendees will be able to try their hand at the activities and brainstorm with fellow educators.

Session 2E

Even You Can Tell Stories From The Black Perspective

Andre Keitt, Co-Chair, Black Narratives Committee, Connecticut Freedom Trail

Tammy Denease Williams, Outreach Director, Connecticut Freedom Trail

Paula Mann-Agnew, Executive Director, Discovering Amistad

Christine Jewell, Director, Ancient Burying Ground Association; Coordinator, 1636 Heritage Partnership; Director, Kent Historical Society

Joanie DiMartino, Curator & Site Superintendent, Prudence Crandall Museum

Conference goers are asked to participate in a dialogue, discussion, and workshop where their own biases are identified, and considered, while creating a fertile and fresh environment, allowing authentic focus and storytelling of the trials, tribulations and triumphs of American

History, specifically, Black History as it is told. Participants will be asked an “Essential/Penetrating Question” about race, which will be followed by discussion. There will also be a writing exercise and vocabulary/expression sharing that will jumpstart the individual attempts of embracing techniques that foster culturally creative museum experiences that are primarily and authentically as Black as possible.

Breakout Session 3 (2:00–3:00)

Session 3A

Public History and the Environment

Leah S. Glaser, Professor of History, Central Connecticut State University

Olivia Grella, CCSU Public History Graduate Student; Marketing and Communications

Manager, Connecticut Landmarks; Subscription Manager, Connecticut Explored

Jon Kozak, CCSU Public History Graduate Student; Communications Manager, Connecticut League of Museums

What can museums and local historical places do to address and prioritize discussions of climate change? This panel will share strategies and examples for including stories about environmental degradation and resilience when interpreting local sites and histories. Examples include energy, trees, pollution, pollution, and environmental activism.

Session 3B

More Than a Checklist: Strengthening Collections Through Strategic Inventories

Dana Meyer, Membership & Digital Projects Manager, Connecticut League of Museums

Diane Lee, Collections Manager, Fairfield Museum & History Center

A comprehensive inventory isn’t just about ticking boxes—it’s a vital tool for strengthening collections, building transparency, and ensuring long-term preservation. This session will explore practical strategies for conducting effective inventories, whether you're using Connecticut Collections (CTCo) or any other system. Join us to learn how a strategic inventory process can help safeguard your institution’s heritage and enhance its resilience for the future.

Session 3C

Resources for Commemorating America at 250

Rachel Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant, America 250 | CT, CT Humanities

Cyndi Tolosa, Director of Advancement, Project Manager, America 250 | CT, CT Humanities

In this session, we'll discuss and share available resources for organizations planning to participate in commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. We will include initiatives, both funded and not funded, by Connecticut organizations, nationwide initiatives that Connecticut organizations can sign on to, and other new developments.

Session 3D

Inviting Curiosity: Navigating Tough Topics in Museum Interpretation

Kristin Robinson, Owner/Interpretive Trainer and Consultant, Stage Naked, LLC

How do we engage audiences in difficult conversations without alienating them? This session equips museum professionals with strategies to foster curiosity and dialogue around complex topics. Join Kristin Robinson to explore tested techniques for reframing discussions, encouraging engagement, and creating space for meaningful, courageous conversations in museum programs.

Session 3E

Case Studies for Piloting and integrating Oral Histories into Public Programming

Fiona Vernal, Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies; Director, Engaged, Public, Oral, and Community Histories, University of Connecticut

Participants will receive updates on how CT organizations are taking advantage of a free license to TheirStory, an oral history recording, transcription, and project management platform; and learn how oral histories have informed the design of three local public history projects and strategies to bring their own projects to fruition.

Breakout Session 4 (3:30–4:30)

Session 4A

Regeneration - Art & Climate Justice

Michelle Fenton Begley, Education Programs Director, American Mural Project
Ellen Griesedieck, Artistic Director, American Mural Project

This interactive session will explore how art and community organizations can partner with schools to center and uplift student voices in the work of climate justice through group artmaking. Regeneration is a multidisciplinary project at the American Mural Project that is bringing students from 10 Connecticut schools together to plant seeds inspired by the vast array of climate solutions that are explored in Paul Hawken's book *Regeneration*.

Session 4B

Open Culture, Creative Commons, and YOU!

Beth Burgess, Collections Curator, Museum of Connecticut History/CT State Library

Jodi Polsgrove, Curator of Collections, DECD/SHPO Museums

Charlotte Lefland, Collections Manager, Housatonic Museum of Art

What does it mean to be Open, and do we want to? Learn about Open Culture, Creative Commons, and how museums are making their collections digitally accessible (for FREE)! Learn why museums may want to consider this, and how CT Collections is helping make this a reality for users.

Session 4C

Breaking Barriers: Building Resilient Communities Through Accessible Digital Communications

Caitlyn Grad, Marketing and Communications Consultant, Caitlyn Grad Marketing

Accessibility isn't just a legal requirement—it's a key strategy for building stronger, more inclusive communities. This session introduces museum professionals to the importance of accessible digital communications and how they can help break down barriers for people with disabilities. We'll cover the legal landscape, including website compliance basics, and explore best practices for writing accessible content, crafting effective alt text, ensuring color contrast, and creating inclusive social media and video content. Attendees will leave with practical tools, real-world examples, and resources for continued learning—empowering them to take actionable steps toward digital equity and resilience.

Session 4D

Interpretation and America 250

Christine Jewell, Educator / Consultant, Educator / Consultant; Ancient Burying Ground Association; The 1636 Heritage Partnership, in support of Center Church, Hartford; and Kent Historical Society

Ellery Thomas Leary, Park Historian, Putnam Memorial State Park

How can we “humanize” history to create engaging stories that build connections with the past? Join us to learn how to integrate history with themes from America 250, AASLH, CT Social Studies Frameworks (CSSF), and other resources. This workshop is for anyone looking for tools and strategies to “translate” information and engage audiences with thought-provoking materials for exhibitions or educational programs.

Session 4E

"Seth, Joseph, Lizzie, and George": Experiencing the Civil War Through New Perspectives

Dan Hayden, Executive Director, New England Civil War Museum

John Mills, Project Consultant, AlexBreanne Corporation

Tammy Denease, Project Consultant, Hidden Women, LLC

Want to transform your museum narrative? Here's how we expanded the traditional narrative of the Civil War to include perspectives from more than just soldiers and sailors. With the help of leaders of African American heritage in Connecticut, our new tour narrative includes the perspectives of Black soldiers, women, and civilians during the war.