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## JMU Campus History Committee Annual Report, 2025-26

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**Date** Thu 5/28/2026 2:51 PM

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Thursday, May 28, 2026 · 8 min read

# JMU Campus History Committee Annual Report, 2025-26



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**Take a look at what we've been up to this year. We hope you enjoy this new newsletter format, too!**

**Contact us at [campushistory@jmu.edu](mailto:campushistory@jmu.edu) or visit our [webpage](#).**

### **Committee Charge:**

- Develop the campus Commemorative Landscape mapping project to inform and make recommendations with regard to naming plans and commemorative opportunities moving forward.
- Examine the JMU story that is told by or in various publications, offices and groups (e.g., the Student Ambassadors, Marketing) about the history of our institution/campus and develop ways the story

being told to our various constituents (including current and prospective students, parents, alumni, the community, etc.) can be more inclusive and complete.

### **2025-26 Members:**

- Meg Mulrooney, Department of History; Faculty Affairs and Curriculum, Chair
- Leigh Ayers, JMU Communications
- Rebecca Barge ('26PhD), Center for Multicultural Student Services
- Ruthie Bosch, Department of EFEX; Hispanic Faculty Caucus
- Tiffany Cole ('10M), Digital Scholarship and Distinctive Collections, Libraries
- Monyette Martin ('93, '96M), Admissions and Enrollment Management
- Carole Nash ('83), School of Integrated Sciences
- Leonard Richards ('13, '14M), Department of MSME
- Craig Short ('13M), Administration and Finance
- Lexy Stover ('23), Annual Giving
- Grace Trembl, Student Representative
- Ryan Sauer, Student Representative

### **Summary of Committee Work for 2025-26**

The committee met monthly this year and completed nine major projects.

#### **1. JMU Campus History Walking Tour (aka Hidden History Tour, HerStory Tour etc. Depending on the theme and group)**

The in-person walking tour remains an important, ongoing project as we try to meet demand for this popular learning experience. ([Digital version](#) of the tour.)

- Cole and Stover delivered tours in October for the Insiders, a subcommittee of the Women for Madison Executive Advisory Council, to help raise awareness of women's historic contributions to JMU.
- Mulrooney and Sauer provided a tour and facilitated discussion to the Mid-Level Managers' Institute of about 25 JMU administrators and managers, who braved the January weather. Mulrooney also gave tours to several colleagues' classes.

- Student member Ryan Sauer led development in the fall 2025 term of a tour training program in collaboration with Mulrooney, Cole, and Stover. A Student Ambassador, Sauer drafted the training manual inspired by the one used by Admissions. He also identified the first group of undergraduate History Tour Guides comprised of members of Madison Historians and Student Ambassadors. The student trainees met several times in person for orientation to the tour’s education purpose and script. In the spring, they were paired with committee members to deliver “demo tours” in preparation for inauguration week.

Caption: Each guide received a badge made by Sauer at the Makery! (Polo shirts are yet to come.)



- Sauer also delivered presentations to Student Ambassadors and Student Government Association, informing members about projects of the Campus History Committee, including the new Inauguration Tours. Ryan delivered two Hidden Histories tours targeted towards Student Ambassadors with the goal of correcting potential misinformation shared on Admissions tours – about 20 participants.
- Mulrooney was an invited speaker at a campus history symposium at the University of Alabama in March. She presented on JMU's tour, the theory and method of walking tours as a form of public history, and a preliminary analysis of about 100 participants’ responses to a survey.

## 2. Alumni Voices Panel for 2026 AAAD Conference, February 13, 2026

Martin, Mulrooney, and Barge organized and moderated a panel for this year's AAAD conference. Titled "Unveiling a Hidden Legacy: Black Alumni and the Sites of Belonging They Built at Madison College, 1966-1976," it featured three alums: Stan Stewart ('78), Deborah Tompkins Johnson ('78), and Janis Smith Wilson ('72). The alumni discussed their roles in three influential student organizations (Delta Sigma Theta, Inc., the Black Student Alliance, and the Contemporary Gospel Singers) that created spaces of support and celebration during the early years of integration. All three organizations are still connected to CMSS, today.

Caption: Martin, Wilson, Johnson, Stewart, Mulrooney after the panel.



Committee member Richards co-presented with Khalil Siddiq on their shared research at the AAAD conference. Their talk was: "Clout, Clicks, and Confusion: Examining Pseudohistorical Narratives and the Denial of African Identity on Tiktok," which explored how social media fosters misinformation about history.

## 3. Inauguration Week, March 2026

In the fall, Mulrooney received an invitation to offer the Quad History Tours during President Schmidt's inauguration week. Several people on the inauguration planning committee had previously taken the tour and thought it would be a good activity to offer in recognition of the historic event. The committee agreed and stepped up the undergraduate tour guide training project intending to offer four tours of 15 people

each. Mulrooney revised the tour script to add more content related to past presidents and first ladies. Sarah Ciccone and JMU Special Events generously offered to manage the rsvp list, which quickly filled, so the tour guide group figured out a way to add seven additional tours. All together, Sauer, Mulrooney, and Stover partnered with six students to deliver 11 tours during inauguration week to about 90 participants.

Caption: George Poulson, a SMAD major, sharing campus history to an inauguration week group. They are in front of Gabbin Hall, the oldest academic building, which opened its doors in September 1909.



Additionally, Cole created a new JMU presidential history slidedeck with highlights from each administration and congratulations to President Schmidt. It went on display inside the exhibit, A Sense of Place, for the months of March, April, and May, when more visitors, including prospective students and their families, are in the building.

In her role as chair of the Native American and Indigenous Working Group (NAIWG), Nash continued to develop JMU's relationship with the Monacan Nation and hosted Chief Diane Shields during the inauguration. This was the first visit by the leader of a sovereign nation to JMU.

#### **4. JMU Class Ring Project, March 2026**

Craig Short brought this innovative project to committee members. Every year, his office helps coordinate the design for the class ring. Each ring features two sides or panels, and current students typically design both each year. His idea was to create a fixed panel that would be the same for each subsequent class year to provide a sense of shared history and identity from class to class. Working with Josten's designers and JMU Kristen Grapes, committee members Short, Mulrooney, Bosch, Cole, Sauer, and Richards created a new JMU legacy panel featuring historic symbols: Wilson Hall, the Quad, the Blue Ridge Mountains, a royal crown, and a dog's paw. Also included are the words "Forever True," from the alma mater, and the degree letters, BA/BS. The new panel will debut on the 2028 rings.



##### **5. Alumni Voices of the 1970s and Vanguard Oral History Project, 2025-2026**

Mulrooney again partnered with Special Collections and Alumni Relations to build the new oral history collection, which seeks to document the remarkable transformation of Madison College into JMU in 1977. Masters' students in her HIST 601 Oral History seminar conducted the first set of 18 interviews during the 2025 Bluestone Reunion weekend (phase 1) and the second set of 10 interviews during the 2026 Reunion (phase 2). Victoria Beahm, events director in Alumni Relations,

coordinated identification of volunteer alumni and sponsored the interviews as an official, registration event. (Thanks to Paula Polglase, Jessica Savoie, and the whole office for their support.) Graduate student intern, Anthony Cordova Ramirez, completed transcriptions in summer 2025, and a volunteer alum, Gage Kivlen, did additional transcription work for phase 1 in spring 2026. Mulrooney separately conducted and transcribed interviews for the Vanguard of early Black alumni (phase 3). Totals as of May 2026:

- 18 interviews fully completed and transferred to JMU Special Collections
- 14 new interviews in process
- Notable alumni interviewed include: Donna Harper ('77), former Vice President for Access and Enrollment; Steve Smith ('71), former Vice President for Advancement; ; Deborah Tompkins Johnson ('78), former BoV member; Dr. Sheary Darcus Johnson ('70), first Black graduate; and James ('71) and Saranna Rankin ('72), second and third Black graduates.

Caption: Tiffany Cole and Kate Morris with HIST 601: Oral History Workshop graduate students on a research visit to Special Collections in February 2026. Their semester-long class provided skills, methods, and theories needed to conduct interviews and to understand how a research collection is created and archived.



## **6. Bluestone Reunion, May 2, 1026**

Other campus history events also occurred this weekend. Stover presented a talk on JMU campus history to a large crowd of alumni in the Allegheny Room, and Erin Conley incorporated content from the [digital Quad History](#) tour into a walking tour for about 30 people. In cooperation with Women for Madison, Mulrooney presented a brief history of the purpose of teas at Madison College and highlighted Bernice Varner's contributions as head of Home Economics and first dean of women. About 80 alumni attended the Women for Madison tea.

## **7. Documenting the Campus's Historic Landscape**

Carole Nash had her spring 2026 class undertake a GIS mapping project to understand better the transformation of the historic farm that eventually became the East Campus. Using historic aerial photos and maps, they identified features remaining in the contemporary landscape, such as the trees in Centennial Plaza outside Rose Library and campus roadways.

Nash continued this year to work with the JMU Farm Committee to research and interpret that property's rich history. [The Farm](#) has once again become a popular venue for campus groups, meetings, and research retreats at the historic 1840s Hooke House. Nash's work has resulted in interpretive panels for inside the historic farmhouse, but future work is anticipated.

## **8. Supporting the JMU VA250th Committee**

In the fall, JMU's VA 250th committee, chaired by Kara Dillard, hosted a screening of Ken Burns' new documentary, *The American Revolution*. Mulrooney nominated faculty with appropriate expertise to serve on a post-screening discussion panel and facilitated communication to History and Political Science faculty who teach American Experience courses in the General Education program. In the Spring, Mulrooney and Dillard joined new conversations with senior staff at Montpelier to plan a fall 2026 panel that would highlight Madison's political thought and feature JMU faculty.

In cooperation with the campus history committee and the VA 250th committee, Nash and her colleagues on the NAIWG plan to host a panel discussion in October 2026 that focuses on the histories and legacies of the Great Valley Road (modern Route 11, Main Street, Lee Highway) from the colonial era to the present. The history of this route and its impact on the campus is not as well known as it could be. Founders of the State Normal and Industrial School at Harrisonburg chose the location along Route 11 (South Main Street) intentionally, and it remains a crucial corridor connecting the JMU campus to downtown Harrisonburg as well as points north and south.

## **9. New Exhibit in Carrier Library, Spring 2026**

Ahead of the Carrier Library re-opening, Tiffany Cole served as curator of a new exhibit on town-gown relationships and is working with other Library colleagues to design and install it. Highlighting items from Special Collections, it explores the changing nature of the relationship between "The Friendly City" and this institution, 1908-present, but with emphasis on recent decades. The exhibit will open in August.

### **On the Horizon for 2026-2027**

- Mulrooney has been appointed inaugural University Historian effective July 1; she will continue to chair the Campus History Committee.
- Tour training for new cohort of undergraduate guides.
- Co-hosting VA 250th panel with Montpelier, tentatively set for Constitution Week, September 2026.
- Co-hosting with NAIWG and the Madison Center a panel on Route 11, October 2026.
- Return to official History of JMU website project; update older Wordpress sites to link again content for univ. history timeline and website (ongoing with Ayers).
- Co-hosting a facilitated discussion related to town-gown relationships in conjunction with the new town-gown exhibit in Carrier Library, Spring 2027.



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