
**Missouri State University-West Plains
Ozarks Studies Committee
presents**



The Nineteenth Annual Ozarks Studies Symposium

“The Missouri Ozarks: Through a 250-Year Lens”

September 17-19, 2026

Sponsored in part by the Missouri Humanities Council



Missouri State University-West Plains is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Institution

The Ozarks Studies Committee is sponsoring this program in partnership with Missouri State University-West Plains, the Ozarks Heritage Research Center, and The West Plains Council on the Arts

The Ozarks Studies Committee Wishes to Recognize the Following Major Supporters of Past Symposiums:

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Community Foundation of the Ozarks

Cover image: postcard, courtesy Tom Kersen

Thursday, September 17, On the Mezzanine, West Plains Civic Center

5:30-7:00 West Plains Council on the Arts

Gallery at the Center – on the mezzanine at the West Plains Civic Center

The Ozarks along Route 66—Photographs by Chuck Davis

Commemorating the Route 66 Centennial and America 250, The Gallery at the Center on the mezzanine level of the West Plains Civic Center presents a fine art perspective of the "Mother Road" as it traverses the Ozarks. By focusing on this specific regional segment, the photographs tell a regional tale that reflects the broader American experience along the historic route.

These images by Chuck Davis are on view from Saturday, September 12 to October 18

Chuck Davis, an Arkansas Artist Fellow (2025), has spent four decades photographing Route 66 from end to end. His award-winning work has been exhibited at major venues such as MASS MoCA and Mount Sequoyah's Creative Spaces, and recently appeared in the Oxford American. He operates the only daylight tintype studio in the Ozarks on the grounds of the abandoned city of Electric Springs, Arkansas.

Refreshments will be served, and the artist will be available to discuss the exhibit.

Friday, September 18, Magnolia Room, West Plains Civic Center

8:30-9:00 Refreshments

9:00 Welcome Address: Zora Mulligan, Chancellor, Missouri State University-West Plains

Tom Kersen's poster presentation, *Trumpet Seances in the Ozarks*, will be on display for the duration of the symposium.

9:30-10:45 Panel 1: *Family Ties and Storytelling in the Ozarks*

- Mara W. Cohen Ioannides, Ozarks Studies Association
 - *Murder-Suicide in the Ozarks: The Story of William and Malinda Lowenstein*
- Jo Van Arkel, Professor of English, Drury University
 - *Ozarks Stories and Wonder Tales*
- Danette House, Ozarks Storyteller
 - *From Scotland to the Ozarks: The Martin Family and a 250-Year American Journey*

11:00-12:15 Panel 2: *The Twentieth-Century Ozarks: Reunion, Land, Art*

- Jared Phillips, University of Arkansas
 - *Deep Ecology in the Hills: How Bioregionalists in the Missouri Ozarks Built the National Bioregional Movement, 1977-1990*
- Tom Kersen, Jackson State University
 - *Reunion and Archaeology of Identity: Returning to Moark After Forty Years*
- Barbara Williams, Artist
 - *The Challenges of Making Art in the Rural Missouri Ozarks: Lennis Leonard Broadfoot and James Edward Deeds*

2:00-3:30 Concurrent Sessions

Film Screenings (Civic Center Auditorium)

- Sarah K. Moore, University of Arkansas: *Witch Hazel Advent, The Story of an Ozark Poet*
- Dave Malone, Poet and Screenwriter: *Tennyson's Maud*

Panel 3: *Ozarks Literary Criticism* (Magnolia Room)

- Craig Albin, Missouri State University-West Plains
 - *The Resonant Howl: Democracy, Dignity, and the Socioeconomic Divide in Daniel Woodrell's Fiction*
- John Han, Missouri Baptist University
 - *Law and Justice in Nancy Allen's Ozarks Crime Fiction*
- Taylor Nichole Libbert, Independent Researcher
 - *Quantification of Missouri Ozarks Literature*

4:00-5:00 Panel 4: *Ozarks Biography*

- Dawn Larsen, Francis Marion University (Emerita)
 - *Andy Miller: Missouri Ozarks Visionary*
- Steve Wiegenstein, Author
 - *John R. Kelso, Ozarks Radical*

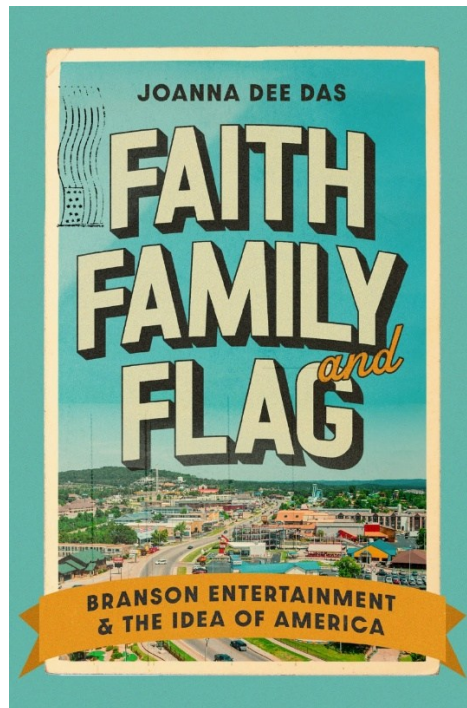
5:30pm

Keynote Presentation
Magnolia Room, West Plains Civic Center

Joanna Dee Das
Washington University

“You’ve Got a Great Past Ahead of You”: Performing American History in the Missouri Ozarks

Author Joanna Dee Das discusses how performances at Silver Dollar City theme park and on the stages of Branson have shaped ideas about American history.



Dr. Joanna Dee Das is Associate Professor of Dance at Washington University in St. Louis. She is the author of *Faith, Family, and Flag: Branson Entertainment and the Idea of America* (The University of Chicago Press, 2025).

Saturday, September 19, Magnolia Room, West Plains Civic Center

8:30-9:30 Panel 5: *African American History of Howell County*

- Dave Malone, Poet and Screenwriter, and Faith Collins, Writer
 - *Early African American Settlement in Howell County, Missouri, 1850-1882: Tracing Migration from Bedford County, Tennessee, and Marion County, Arkansas*
- Crockett W. Oaks III, Founder and Executive Director, Lincoln School Project
 - *Lincoln School Project: Preservation, Memory, and Community Transformation in the Missouri Ozarks*

10:00-11:45 Panel 6: *Ozarks Fiction*

- James Fowler, University of Central Arkansas (emeritus)
 - "Rounds"
- John Mort, Author
 - "Her Pretty Feet"
- Stephanie Saunders, Lyon College
 - Covered Buttons
- Allison Cundiff, Lindenwood University and Parkway Schools
 - The Mysterious Women of J Road: *A Literary Celebration of the Mythology of the Missouri Ozarks*

1:30-3:00 Panel 7: *Entertainment and Having Fun in the Ozarks*

- James Seawel, Therapist, Essayist
 - *Hymns and Honky Tonks: The Ozarks World That Created Ashley McBryde*
- Zachary W. Omans, Game Designer
 - *Discovering My Roots Through Game Design*
- Leslie Reed, Arkansas State University
 - *The Rhetorics of Ozark Swimming Holes along the Lawrence County, Arkansas, Ecotone Area*
- Susanna Reichling, Missouri State University
 - *Discovering a Treasure in the Dust: The Unexpected Story of an Ozarks Folk Music Collaboration*

3:15-4:30 Panel 8: *Communication, Transportation, and Preserving the Ozarks*

- Susan Croce Kelly, Author
 - *100 Years of Route 66 in the Ozarks—And Then Some*
- Brian Fickett, Springfield Art Museum
 - *Preserving the Ozarks at Springfield Art Museum*
- Kim McCully-Mobley, Aurora High School/Drury University/Crowder College
 - *Letters from Home*

Twentieth Annual Ozarks Studies Symposium, 2027

Call for Proposals

The Ozarks Studies Committee of Missouri State University-West Plains seeks proposals for its 20th annual symposium to be held at the West Plains Civic Center on September 16-18, 2027.

The theme of the 2027 symposium is “*****.” This broad theme is intended to accommodate consideration of a wide variety of topics. The committee is also happy to consider a variety of supplemental topics or approaches related to the Ozarks.

For purposes of this symposium, the Ozarks is defined broadly to encompass much of southern Missouri and northern Arkansas and adjacent portions of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois.

Community members, historians, oral historians, folklorists, artists, writers, scholars, or students representing any discipline or field are invited to propose presentations consistent with this theme. Each presenter will be allotted 25 minutes; presenters will be asked to limit their prepared presentations to approximately 20 minutes to allow time for questions and discussion. Presentations may take the form of conventional conference papers or any other form suitable for such a symposium.

Proposals should be approximately 200 to 300 words in length and should include a preliminary summary of the content of the proposed presentation and a list of any audio-visual or other technological requirements. They should also include the submitter's name, institutional affiliation and/or professional title, and complete contact information.

Student Sessions: The Ozarks Studies Symposium encourages students of all levels to contribute proposals, including poster session proposals related to the theme.

Email proposals to Dr. Jason McCollom, Professor of History at Missouri State University-West Plains, at jasonmccollom@missouristate.edu. To be given first consideration, proposals must be received by July 1, 2027.