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# Kentucky

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*Fall 2019*  
*Kentucky Humanities*

**INSIDE:** 2019 Kentucky Book Festival Catalog

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# Kentucky

Fall 2019

## humanities



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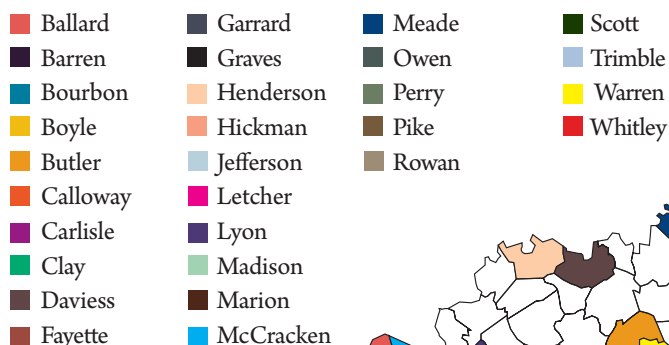
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# Turning the Page to Autumn

**F**all is always one of my favorite times of the year. In addition to the cooler temperatures, the majestic views produced by the turning of the leaves while traveling Kentucky's country roads, I always look forward to our annual celebration of reading and writing in the Commonwealth!

Lamar Herrin is one of 200 authors who will be in attendance at the 38th Annual Kentucky Book Fair on Saturday, November 16th, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Alltech Arena at the Kentucky Horse Park. Linda Elisabeth LaPinta gives us a glimpse of Herrin's book, *Fishing the Jumps: A Novel* on page 8. In the center of this magazine, you can find out more about Herrin and all the authors attending the fair, the schedule of events, and the ways you can participate in the 2019 Kentucky Book Festival!

Are you familiar with Appalshop? Located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, Appalshop has spent the last 50 years working to improve the lives of those in Eastern Kentucky. You will be amazed by what they have accomplished and the projects they have planned for the future! We are delighted to share a look at 50 years of Appalshop beginning on page 11.

Dr. Michael T. Benson became the president of Eastern Kentucky University in 2013. During his time in the Commonwealth, Dr. Benson has developed an appreciation for the higher education tradition in the state. While what is most often reported about education in Kentucky is doom and gloom, Dr. Benson takes a look at the things Kentucky is getting right. You don't want to miss his article on page 17.

Gregory Wolk is the Heritage Programs Coordinator at Missouri Humanities and has done extensive study of Colonel Ulysses Grant and his travel through Missouri, Illinois, and Kentucky during the Civil War. Beginning on page 22, Wolk shares with us Grant's time in Kentucky in 1862.

Dr. Marshall Myers will also be signing his newest book *The Rhetoric of Lincoln's Letters* at the Kentucky Book Fair. Over the years, he has authored more than 300 poems, short stories, and academic pieces, as well as two books on the Civil War in Kentucky. On page 26, Myers, a native of Meade County, shares the story of the free slave farm located there.

And last, Georgia Green Stamper reminisces about her early years in school. Her essay, "What Books Have Meant to Me" is a story many of us can relate to. It is on page 30.

Please enjoy this issue of *Kentucky Humanities* magazine and the 2019 Kentucky Book Festival Catalog included inside. It is our privilege to share these Kentucky stories with you. Have a Kentucky story to share? Contact our editor, Marianne Stoess, [marianne.stoess@uky.edu](mailto:marianne.stoess@uky.edu).



Bill Goodman

Executive Director  
Kentucky Humanities

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Goodman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.



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## Two new members elected to Kentucky Humanities Board

Paula E. Cunningham and Ronald G. Sheffer were elected to the Kentucky Humanities board of directors at the April, 2019 board meeting. They will each serve a three-year term, with a second three-year term optional. As members of the 23-person volunteer board of directors, Cunningham and Sheffer will help set council policies, award project grants to community organizations, and participate in fund-raising to help Kentucky Humanities meet the growing demand for its programs.



**Paula E. Cunningham**

Paula E. Cunningham, of Kuttawa, is a long-time Kentucky resident who looks forward to making contributions to Kentucky and enlightening others through the endeavors of Kentucky Humanities. She is the previous owner and president of McClanahan Publishing House, Inc., which specialized in publishing books by Kentucky authors in both fiction and non-fiction. Prior to working in the publishing industry, Cunningham lived in Frankfurt, Germany, and worked for John A. Ryan Associates, serving as assistant to the owner for the sales of U.S. products and to the U.S. military in Europe. She earned a bachelor of science degree in merchandising from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. An active member of her community, Cunningham has served as the past president of the Eddyville Woman's Club, a member of the Lyon County Democratic Women, a board member of Pennyroyal Regional Mental Health, a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and a board member of the Kentucky Commission on Women.



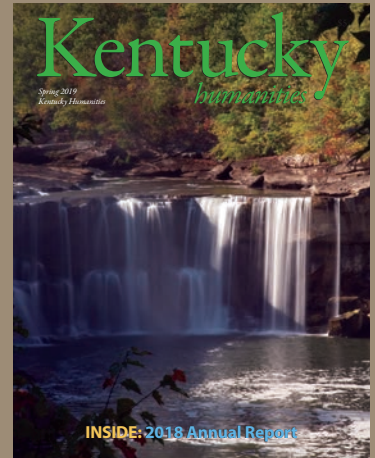
**Ronald G. Sheffer**

Ronald G. Sheffer owns and manages Sheffer Law Firm, PLLC, with offices in Louisville and Owensboro. The firm has a statewide and national trial practice. Sheffer's practice areas include medical and nursing home negligence, wrongful death, personal injury, white collar criminal, and equine law. He previously worked as a criminal prosecutor in State Court and in private practice. In 1982, Sheffer was one of the leaders in forming a firm that grew into a statewide law firm with offices located across the state of Kentucky and Southern Indiana. Sheffer was born and raised in Henderson, Kentucky. He attended Western Kentucky University. Following his college graduation, Sheffer served tours of duty at Fort Benning, Georgia, and Fort Hood, Texas, ending his Army tenure with a year in Vietnam. For his service in Vietnam, he was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge and two Bronze stars. After completing his military service, Sheffer taught high school government at Henderson High School. He decided to pursue a law career and went on to graduate from the University of Kentucky College of Law.



## Keep Your Subscription Coming!

Are you a friend of Kentucky Humanities? Your generous gifts support *Kentucky Humanities* magazine. Please use the envelope included in this issue or visit [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org) to make a donation today. We hope you will join us in *Telling Kentucky's Story*.





Tune into WEKU Radio (88.9 FM) each weekday for a trip back in time with host Bill Goodman. Each day we will share an important moment in Kentucky history. Think History is produced by Kentucky Humanities and airs weekdays at 8:19 a.m. and 5:19 p.m. on WEKU, Kentucky's NPR Station. Miss an episode? You can find previously aired episodes at [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org).

## Five new Kentucky Chautauqua® dramas under development

Auditions for new Kentucky Chautauqua dramas were held Friday, June 7th in Lexington. We have selected five new dramas to join our Kentucky Chautauqua line-up. These actors will spend the next year developing their performances and will be ready for booking beginning August 1, 2020.

- Jacqueline Hamilton as detective novelist Sue Grafton
- Kevin Hardesty as attorney and statesman Henry Clay
- Michael Jones as American soldier and the first black colonel in the United States Army Charles Young
- Megan Mortis as World War I nurse Mary W. Arvin
- Letitia Usher as reporter and author Helen Thomas

# Thank You, George McGee

George McGee has portrayed Kentucky Chautauqua's Henry Clay since 1995. During his time as Kentucky's Great Statesman, McGee has given more than 900 performances for audiences totaling more than 89,000 throughout the Commonwealth, making history come alive for both the young and the young-at-heart.

In 2019, George retired his Henry Clay performance. Kentucky Humanities is grateful for the hours spent, the miles traveled, and the many, many audience members Henry Clay captivated.

Thank you, George McGee, for helping us Tell Kentucky's Story!





# FISHING THE JUMPS: A Novel

By Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

**L**amar Herrin may be the best writer of whom you have never heard. He is certainly among the best novelists to have graduated from the University of Kentucky, and there are plenty of first-rate scribes in that lot — Bobbie Ann Mason, Ed McClanahan, and Gurney Norman among them.

It seems Herrin has led an interesting life starting with spending his childhood singing, dancing, tap dancing, and playing baseball; taking a hiatus from college to act in Hollywood and play poker with the likes of Peter Lorrie and Frankie Avalon; and returning to UK to major in English and settle into the business of perfecting his fiction by writing from the facts to find the truth.

Of course, one shouldn't confuse Herrin's life with his work, but it's interesting to note how the trajectory of his adventures, the highlights of which extend to moving to Europe, marrying a Spaniard, fathering a son, and settling back in the States to teach English at Cornell University, infused him with the sensibility of a raconteur whose sweep is simultaneously profound, panoramic, and playful.

*Fishing the Jumps: A Novel* is the latest of his five award-winning books, and the fact that the University Press of Kentucky, which is housed on the campus that launched his career, published this particular masterpiece is fitting. There is no denying that *Fishing the Jumps* is a work of genius. Here's why.

On its surface, the tale centers on two men, old friends who reside in upstate New York. The narrator, Jim McManus, hails from the South; his friend, Walter Kidman, was raised in the North. Herrin's tale is theirs in the sense that the pair's relationship shapes a solid stratum of the story, but further forging and sealing their camaraderie is the gothic saga the narrator relates of his archetypal Southern family defined by privilege, perfection, and perfidy in addition to despair and desolation. Night after summer night sprawled in lounge chairs by a lake sharing bottles of Jim Beam and listening to the lament of cello strings plucked by an introverted loner a few docks down, Jim regales Walter with a personal *Buddenbrooks* that



is as startlingly universal and transcendent as the act of fishing the jumps, or catching a literal or metaphorical fish in the midst of a frenzied state.

Herrin’s narrative style is seamless, his emotional intelligence expert. Jim voices his truth then turns to Walter, and the past and present become a piece as time and space crash into each other and blend—waves of realization in the greater scheme of things. At one point Jim and Herrin (for the author and narrator boast a Janus-like profile) pause to ruminate, “The years wore on. Your favorite team lost a game they’d waited years to play, and you, their biggest fan, didn’t see how you could live through the following day, but you did, and then your team’s loss became a footnote, a day in the team’s history you taught your eyes to jump over, and life began again. Or you switched favorite teams, or found another sport to devote your fandom to. Sports scars were famously quick to heal. Most scars were if you gave them time. Some scars you might even forget where to look for on your body. Which leg? Which arm? Using mirrors you could inspect every inch of your flesh because you knew the scar had to be there somewhere, even though it wasn’t, even though it was gone. Scars did not last lifetimes because lives did not last lifetimes. We all had more than one. A life’s stories came in multiples, so unless someone is there to pull you back into an earlier lifetime, pull you back and pull you back, maybe only for the sport of it, never intending to land you for good, you could outlive your scars and emerge at last as pristine as the day you were born.”

*Fishing the Jumps* is a *bildungsroman*, a mystery, and a prose poem, too, in its lush, layered honesty, verbal ingenuity, and elegant humanity. Former North Carolina Poet Laureate Fred Chappell states of Herrin’s book, “When I finished reading, I felt a little lonesome; the story and I had become close friends.” This reader felt the same.



Lamar Herrin, a University of Kentucky graduate, is a professor emeritus at Cornell University and the author of seven novels including *The Lies Boys Tell*, *House of the Deaf*, *Fractures*, and a memoir, *Romancing Spain*.

### About the Author

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta directs Spalding University’s doctoral program in leadership. Under her maiden name, Beattie, she published three books related to Kentucky writers and a fourth book about intimate partner abuse. In addition, she has published numerous book reviews and magazine articles in regional and national newspapers, magazines, and journals.



# The Smithsonian is coming to Kentucky!

September 12, 2020-October 10, 2020 in Loretto

October 17, 2020-November 14, 2020 in Bedford

November 21, 2020-January 2, 2021 in Morgantown

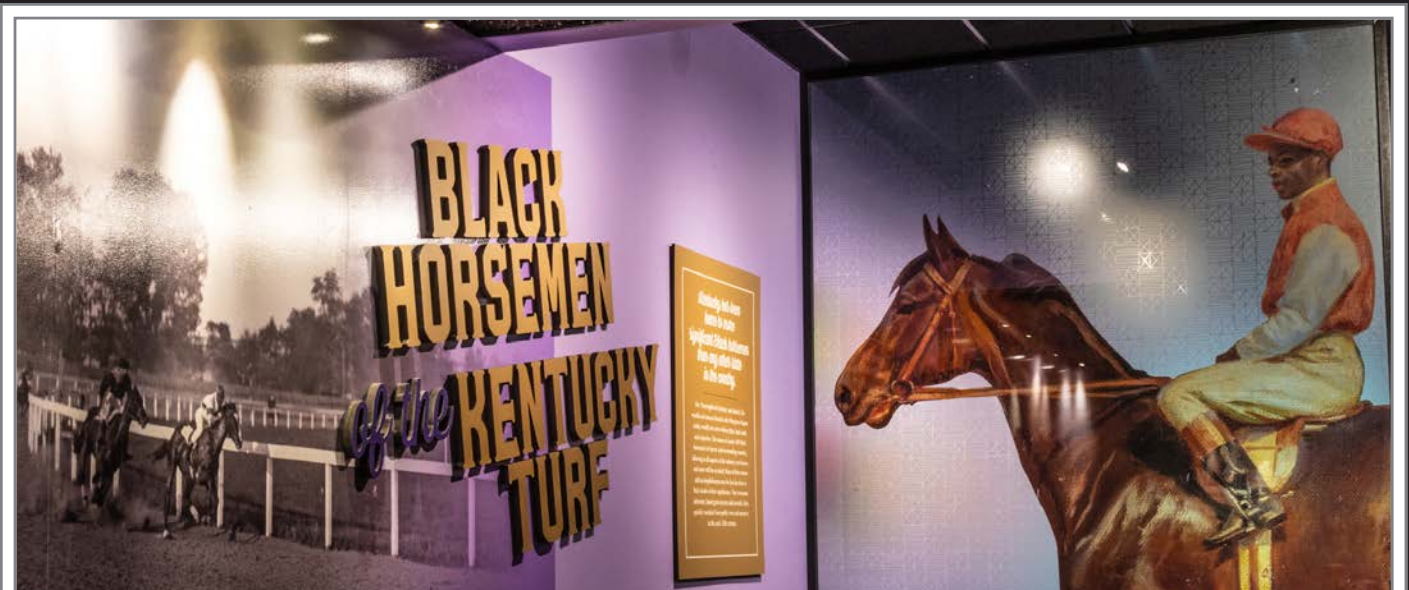
January 9, 2021-February 13, 2021 in Paducah

February 20, 2021-April 3, 2021 in Pikeville

April 10, 2021-May 15, 2021 in Glasgow

May 22, 2021-June 26, 2021 in Paris

Learn more at [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org).



The International Museum of the Horse is committed to educating about the relationship between humans and horses throughout history.



Smithsonian  
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# Appalshop at

# 50

**W**hat do you call an organization that makes both films and birth control available? What about a radio station that broadcasts the voices of volunteer DJs and people incarcerated nearby?

How about an organization that generates both solar power and people power?

Located in the heart of Appalachia, we call ourselves Appalshop. This year we're celebrating 50 years.

We operate a radio station, a theater, a public art gallery, a record label, an archive, a film institute, a reproductive justice program, a community development program, and a frankly dizzying array of other initiatives, all in a renovated warehouse in downtown Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Just a few months ago, we installed the largest net-metered renewable energy system in the region and helped our partners install their own. We participate in art and cultural exchanges that take us to the Bronx and to Zuni Pueblo. Here in Eastern Kentucky, we're hard at work to install a Letcher County walking trail, support a music education camp for girls and gender non-conforming teens, and create a community fund for local businesses like Black Sheep Brick Oven Bakery.

And that's just a fraction of what we've been up to this year.

But when we got our start in the fall of 1969, there was no Appalshop exactly—just a workshop. Its goal was simple: teach young Kentuckians to operate 16 mm film equipment, boost the economy through vocational training, and offer a counternarrative to the one that made Eastern Kentucky the poster child for American poverty.

It was a runaway success. Young people in Whitesburg learned how to operate cameras, audio recorders, and a “portable video

machine” from an instructor who was still quite young himself. Bill Richardson came to Eastern Kentucky when he was 26 years old and fresh out of graduate school at Yale, where he'd written a thesis heralding the potential of 16 mm video equipment to be “an amazing recorder of community.”

Little did he know how right his thesis would be.

The films made in that workshop beginning in 1969 successfully recorded the Letcher County community in a way that few newsreels had managed during the War on Poverty's media blitz, and in the case of at least one local participant, the workshop paved the way to a lifelong career as a filmmaker.

Herb E. Smith, 17 years old when he made his first film, now has more than a dozen films under his belt and can still be seen around Appalshop today with his trademark handlebar mustache.

“We felt like it was our job to stay and make a go of it in this place,” Smith said. “People left, all around here, by the thousands, the tens of thousands. We felt like the way you deal with it is by creating the alternative.”

There was certainly an appetite for one, remembers Elizabeth Barret, another award-winning filmmaker who joined Appalshop in 1973.

“It was informed by all this stuff that was negative about the region. It was *Deliverance*, *Hee Haw*, *Beverly Hillsbillies*,” Barret said.

“The pictures from *Life* magazine were not how you'd portray your home if that was your home,” explained Donna Porterfield, who joined Appalshop's staff in 1978. “People coming in, shooting stuff, take it to New York City; now you almost have the story they're gonna tell before they even come.”

Not so at Appalshop. By 1975, the film-training workshop had 20 full-time employees and annual funding of \$1 million. Grant money was coming in and so were Appalachian young people,

making art, music, theater, and other creative work far beyond the scope of the original film workshop that had started it all in 1969.

This year we're celebrating 50 years. As we reexamine our roots, we're struck by the way that the goals of that first workshop still hold up in 2019: we still want to boost the local economy, and the nation again needs a corrective to the *Hillbilly Elegy* narrative that would cast our region as the barefoot epicenter of backwards poverty.

Once again, young Appalachians are leading the way. Just ask Willa Johnson, director of our Appalachian Media Institute for young people. Every year she asks teenagers how they would represent their home in a single image, "good or bad."

"Every single year they all say the beautiful landscape of Pine Mountain—until this year," explained Johnson. "This year kids said downtown Whitesburg. The lights are up, there are new businesses everywhere, and they're excited about their community in a way they've never been before."

Fifty years after our founding, we're still telling stories that national media miss or get wrong. We're still working to empower people within our region to tell their own stories, engage in creative placemaking, and solve regional problems in regional ways.

Fifty years later, we're still here, disseminating Appalachian traditions and creating new ones in Eastern Kentucky.

You can join us. Be part of the dialogue about mountain communities that's happening in our state and in the world. We've seen what investment in mountain people can do—the incredible creativity and ingenuity it can unleash—and as we celebrate our 50th anniversary, we would love to include you in the conversation.

"The truth is, Louisville is an incredible city, and Lexington is a very pleasant one, but the success of these two places is wholly connected with the resilience of its hinterlands," wrote Appalshop's Executive Director Alex Gibson recently in the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. "If the last year has taught us anything, it is that we have a mandate to deepen rural-urban linkages that facilitate strategic cooperation."

Check out our calendar of events and make plans for a trip out to Whitesburg. Or screen one of our films and bring Whitesburg to your community. We'll be celebrating our anniversary beginning this fall and continuing through 2020.

Help us write the next 50 years of Appalshop history—together.

1969	1974	1979	1984	1989
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## Appalshop Films

Photography Workshop 1972-1978

Mountain Review 1975-1981

Roadside Theater

June Appal Recordings

Headwaters Television

Appalshop Center

WMMT-FM

Seedtime in the Cumberland

Appalachian Media Institute

Production & Education Enc

American Festival Project





1969  
Bill & Josephine Richardson

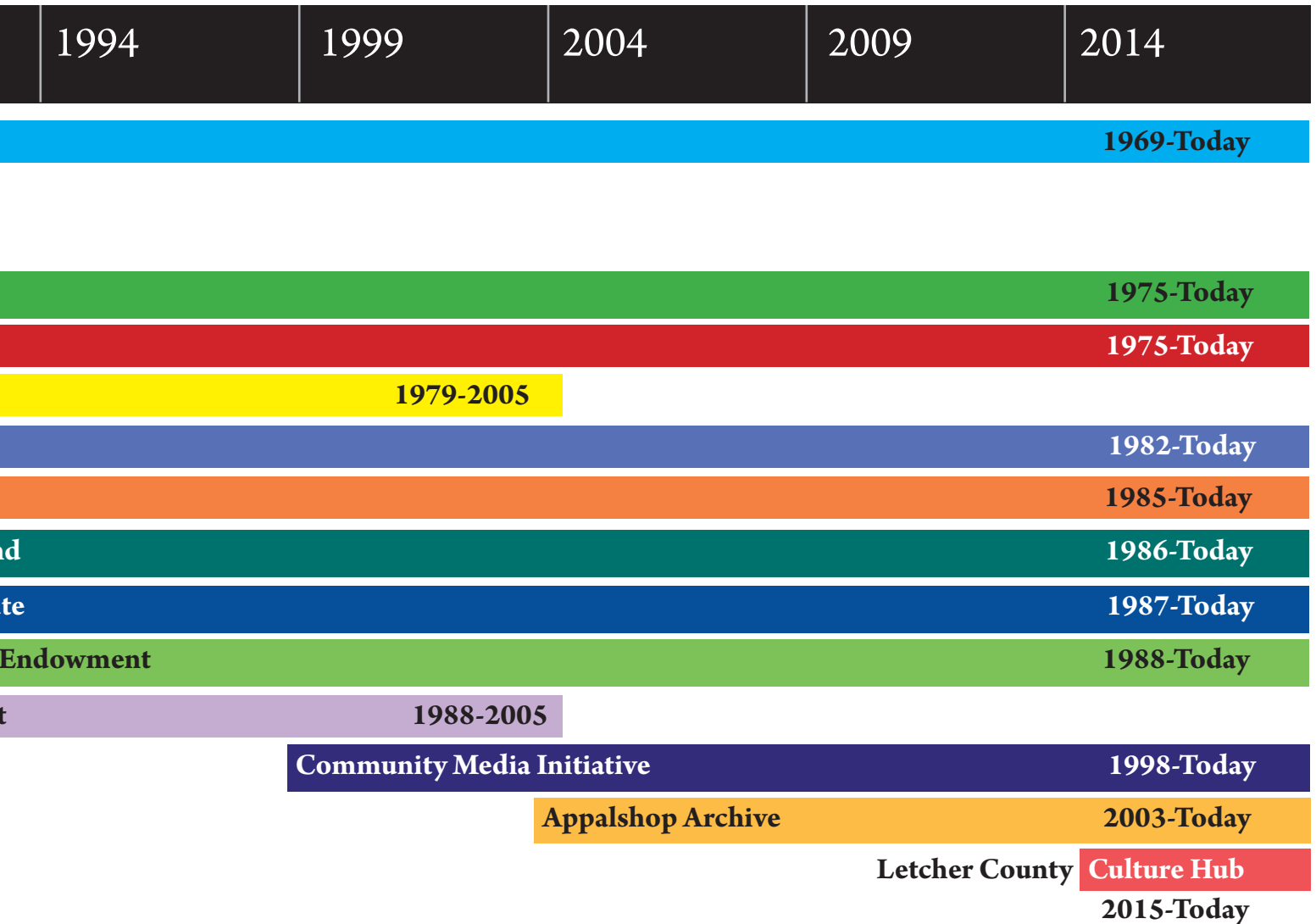


1975  
Appalshop  
Staff

1986  
Appalshop filmmaker  
Anne Lewis filming  
miners



## Organizational & Project Timeline





**1979**  
Appalshop filmmaker Elizabeth Barret

### 1969-1982 — Institutional Formation

The Office of Economic Opportunity funded Community Film Workshops across the country. The purpose was two-fold: 1) train struggling youth for careers in the growing film industry, and 2) demonstrate how film media may be used for community development purposes to build dialogue among disparate groups. During the evaluation phase of this project, the former goal related to workforce development had clearly taken more political root. The Community Film Workshop in Appalachia, located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, embraced the latter goal while still exploring opportunities to grow the film industry in the region through community-based cable stations. When the workshop became a separate nonprofit, its members endeavored to tell the story of Appalachia from the voices of Appalachians, not the mainstream media. They expanded their approach to this mission, using theater, music, photography, and literary work. In 1982-83, Appalshop moved into a newly renovated building and in many ways solidified its mission and worker-managed organizational structure for the coming two decades. During this period, different projects began to expand their focus from product development/distribution to articulating better their community engagement and education methodologies as a vital part of their work.



**1982**  
Appalshop building

**1989**  
DJs Ron Brunty & Virgil Prinkleton at WMMT



### 1983-1998 — Organizational Growth

This period was marked by a considerable expansion in activities, staff, and annual revenue. By the end of the period, Appalshop's staff had more than doubled and its annual budget had increased by as much as 400 percent. Appalshop's film education activities, grounded in the organization's original mission, officially formed into the Appalachian Media Institute. In addition, Appalshop increased its outreach within and outside the region. With new projects like Seedtime on the Cumberland and the American Festival Project, Appalshop encouraged more cultural exchange regionally, nationally and internationally. The formation of WMMT-FM community radio provided a new media to tell stories about the region and connect with new regional audiences. Roadside Theater toured in this period to 43 states and Europe. In the late 1980s, Appalshop leveraged several NEA Challenge Grants to raise money for a Production and Education Fund, which allowed those within the organization more independence to access seed funding for new project development.



**1984**  
Lee Sexton records on Appalshop's record label, June Appal

## 1999-2005 — Organizational Contraction

Both NEA and NEH budgets were cut in the late '90s and by the early 2000s, private foundation funding was also strained. For Appalshop, this period meant significant cuts to the organizational budget and staff. By 2014, Appalshop had gone from around 33 staff members at its peak to 10 staff members. Appalshop altered its board several times by increasing the number of members external to the organization, both community and national representatives, and decreasing the number of board and executive committee members. Periodically, the board recommended more cross-disciplinary (cross-project) work, diversifying funding sources including non-arts funding, and developing the leadership potential of a new generation of staff. Appalshop proceeded to expand its funding portfolio through crowdfunding (e.g. IndieGoGo) and other sources (e.g. Friends of Appalshop). From 1977 through 2008, Appalshop received 62 grants totaling nearly \$600,000 from Kentucky Humanities.

The number of project activities declined; however, a few newer projects proved very successful and demonstrated the changing approaches to telling the Appalachian story. WMMT-FM's radio program, *Hip Hop from the Hilltop/Calls from Home*, which connects prison inmates in the region with their families across the U.S., generated other project activities within Appalshop that explored connections between Appalachia and urban life (*Holler to the Hood*), and the criminal justice system (*Thousand Kites*). In addition, Appalshop officially created its own archive to preserve its work and the work of Appalachian artists.



2015  
Live performance in  
Appalshop's Theater

## 2006-Today

While still staying true to its storytelling mission, Appalshop has gone to a nine-member board, has expanded its project scope, and grown its staff (about 20 members). Appalshop has taken steps to articulate more its cultural work as community economic development work. For example, it received a place-making grant to facilitate the development of a Letcher County Culture Hub comprised of different community organizations. WMMT-FM built on community partnerships to create public health programming, and other projects in the organization have focused on regional concerns about alternative energy, childcare services, and small business development.

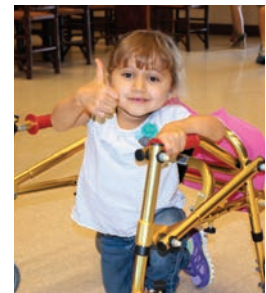


1990s  
Appalshop filmmaker Mimi Pickering

Photo by Willa Johnson



2019  
Ribbon cutting of  
Appalshop's solar pavilion



# Improving Lives

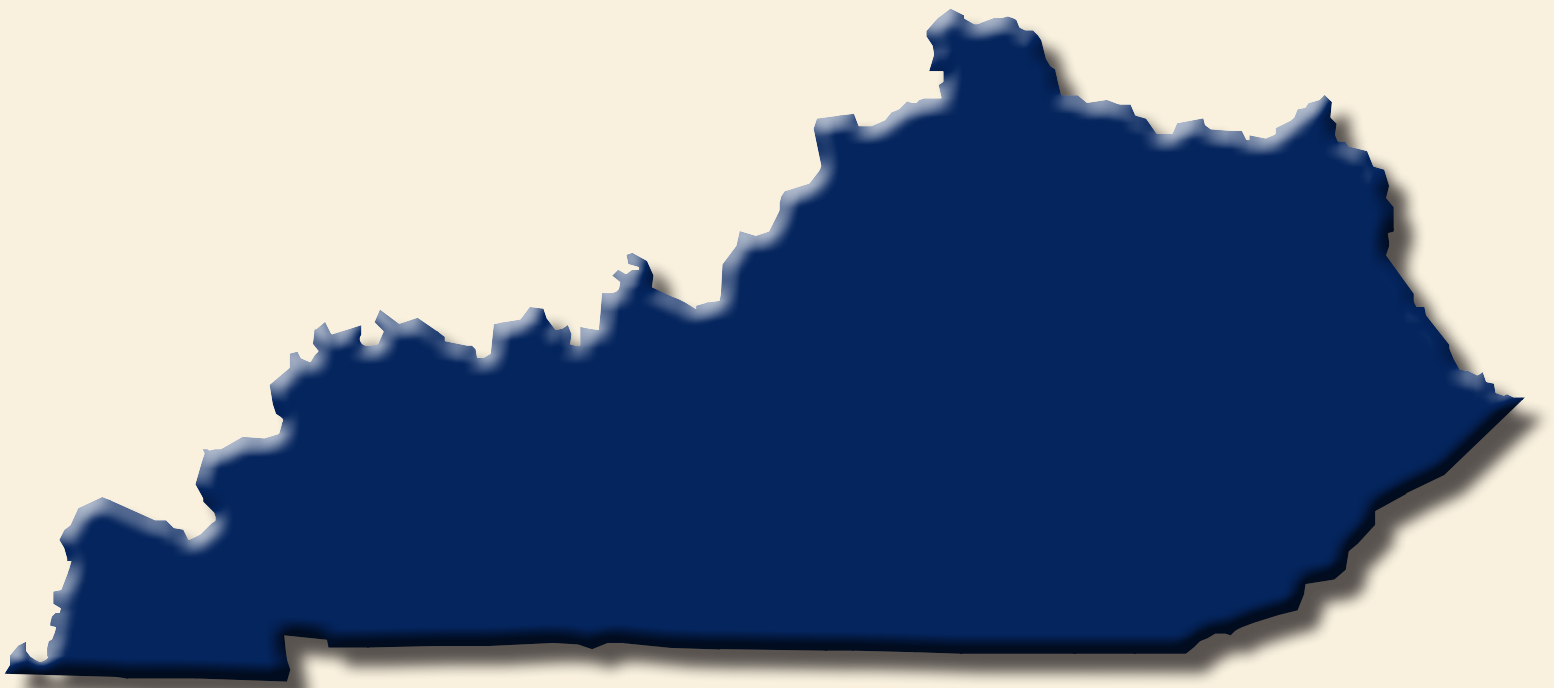
The Kentucky Colonels, through our Good Works Program, is proud to once again sponsor the

***Kentucky Humanities Council.***

Learn more about how The Kentucky Colonels improve lives throughout the Commonwealth at [KyColonels.org](http://KyColonels.org).







# Kentucky's Higher Education Tradition and the Role of the University

By Michael T. Benson

Since my family and I moved to Kentucky in 2013, many people have asked us how we like living in the Commonwealth. I grew up in Dallas, Texas, and Kentucky feels very much like the south to me. My wife and I appreciate the pace of life, the kindness of the people, and the beauty—and green—that surrounds us. When we tell our friends and family back in Utah (we relocated from the high desert of Cedar City, Utah, elevation 6,000 feet) that we live on two acres and there isn't one sprinkler head on our property, they ask us if we live on dirt. But our hearty Kentucky Bluegrass stays green year round, and the lushness of our plants, flowers, trees, and shrubs is a source of great wonder and satisfaction. And the fact that our children are learning to say “yes ma'am” and “no sir” and even starting to pick up a bit of a southern drawl is an added bonus!

Another aspect of life in Kentucky that I've come to appreciate is the richness of the higher education tradition within our borders. For a relative small state (37th in size geographically) with a modest population (4.5 million people ranks Kentucky 26th),

we have a breadth and wealth of colleges and universities which is really quite remarkable. Right here in our home county of Madison is Eastern Kentucky University, where I have the privilege of serving as its 13th president. Our school began as Central University, founded by the Presbyterian Church in 1874. Beset by financial struggles in the early 20th century, Central merged with Centre College in Danville before becoming a state institution in 1906, focused primarily on teacher training and adopting the name Eastern Kentucky State Normal School No. 1.

Today, EKU boasts several nationally- and internationally-renowned programs, more than 16,000 students on three campuses and online, and more than 125,000 living alumni. Our tuition and fees are very reasonable—especially when one considers comparable institutions—and amount to less than \$9,500 per year for Kentucky residents. One iconic feature on campus is a statue of our county's most famous explorer, the inimitable Daniel Boone, whose left foot is astonishingly bright, thanks to the many students who rub it religiously for good luck during finals week.



Located in Richmond, Kentucky, Eastern Kentucky University is home to this statue of legendary pioneer and explorer Daniel Boone. In addition to its main campus in Richmond, EKU maintains branch campuses in Corbin, Hazard, Lancaster, and Manchester.

## Berea College

Just down the road from our campus is Berea College. I don't think there is any other institution quite like it anywhere. Berea was founded in 1855 by abolitionist John Gregg Fee and was the first school in the South to be both racially integrated and coeducational. Currently, it has approximately 1,600 students with an endowment greater than \$1 billion. And not one student pays tuition. I was invited by my good friend and president of Berea College, Lyle Roelofs, to attend their May Commencement ceremony a few years ago. As the faculty entered the Seabury Center, they were followed by work supervisors (some of whom are faculty as well), because every single student is required to hold down a 10- to 15-hour-per-week job on campus. As freshmen, students are assigned to their places of employment; thereafter, the onus falls to them to find jobs they would prefer to do. But everyone works, and for their labors, each student receives a paycheck and a labor grant. In addition, every student is guaranteed a full-tuition scholarship with the equivalent value of \$23,400 per year for four years. As a result, Berea graduates are unshackled with the crushing burden of student debt that threatens to snuff out the dreams and aspirations of so many even before they launch their personal and professional

careers. Thirty-five percent of Berea graduates earn degrees with zero debt; the rest complete their programs with loans a quarter of the national average.

Like millions of others, I took on debt to pay for all three of my degrees, the last of which I completed in 2011. At present, I am enrolled in an online master of liberal arts program at Johns Hopkins University and pay for each course as I go. I just completed a course this summer on Medieval England and am enrolled in a History of the Civil War class for the fall. Happily, the loans I took out to help pay for my other degrees have all been retired. But I consider myself one of the lucky ones, as too many undergraduates today will collect a diploma with difficult job prospects and loan debt in the tens of thousands. Still and all, I remind students constantly of Benjamin Franklin's wise adage: "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

## "Lost Opportunities"

In 2015, I had the privilege of participating in Leadership Kentucky. I remember the first evening together with our class at Shaker Village, listening to Kentucky State Historian,

Professor James Klotter of Georgetown College. He gave a talk entitled, “Lost Opportunities,” and I don’t recall ever being so enthralled in my life by historical examples of a state at the proverbial crossroads—and, unfortunately, choosing the wrong one. The first example of three Klotter used detailed the Commonwealth’s first chance to really make a mark in education with the founding of Transylvania in 1780. By the 1820s, Transylvania was arguably one of the three best colleges in the United States, and was certainly the best in the South. In an 1820 letter to Joseph Cabell, Thomas Jefferson believed that Virginia needed to improve its educational offerings or else, as he put it, “We must send our children for education to Kentucky [Transylvania] or Cambridge [Harvard].” Remarkably, when Jefferson Davis, who later became the confederate president, entered the Senate, fully 10 percent of his legislative peers were Transylvania alumni. And yet Transylvania’s status began to wane when the school’s president, Reverend Horace Holley, “angered Governor Joseph Desha, who accused the school of becoming elitist. Desha and the General Assembly cut off Transylvania’s state funding. . . . Holley finally resigned under pressure, the school lost momentum, and perhaps the state’s best chance for a world-class university had passed.”<sup>1</sup>

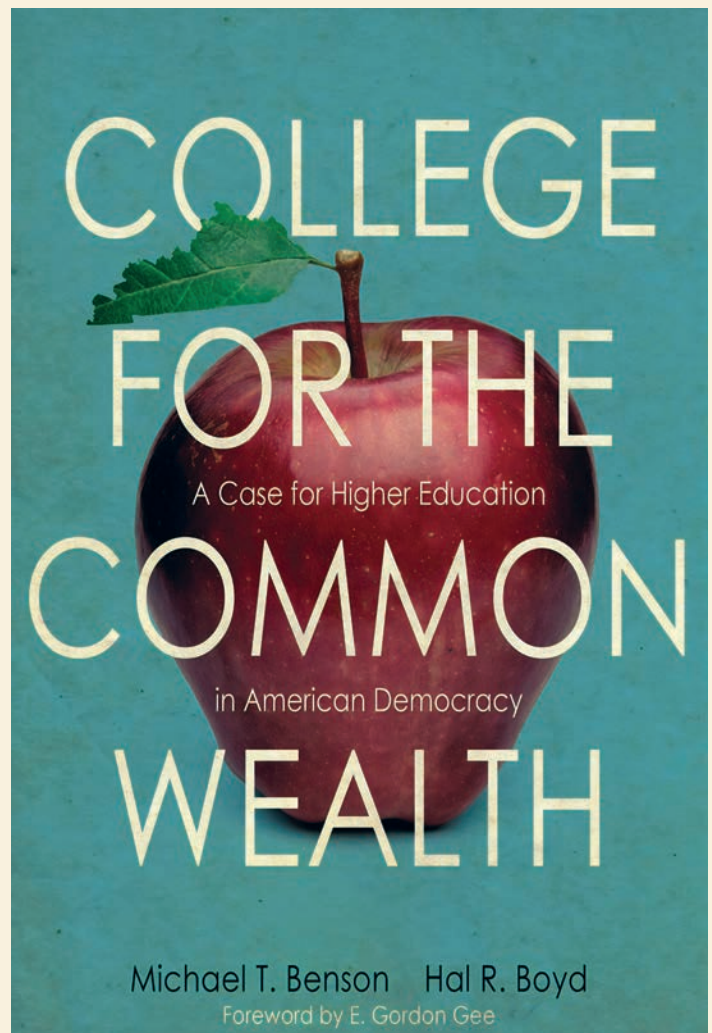
In spite of this lost opportunity, two centuries later we are still endowed with remarkable institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth. In point of fact, I was so inspired by Professor Klotter’s speech and his historical examples that I decided to write a book exploring similar subjects. After speaking at Yale Law School in November 2015 about the incalculable impact of the Morrill Land Grant and the G.I. Bill on American higher education, a third-year law student, Hal Boyd, and I decided to collaborate on the project together. The finished product, published last year by the University Press of Kentucky, is entitled *College for the Commonwealth: A Case for Higher Education in American Democracy*. For all the challenges higher education in America faces (and we outline many of them), we chose to focus on examples of how Kentucky higher education is getting it right: the work-study program at Berea College, the Study Abroad Program at Centre College, the 120-county extension and health services provided by the University of Kentucky throughout our state, and the aviation program at Eastern Kentucky—the only one in the Commonwealth. Our sincere thanks go to the top-flight editors and staff at the University Press of Kentucky who continue to perform such a remarkable service to our Commonwealth by telling the stories of its people. We are truly fortunate to have such a state treasure in the Press.

**Michael T. Benson and Hal R. Byrd completed their book *College for the Commonwealth: A Case for Higher Education in American Democracy* in 2018. Published by the University Press of Kentucky, the book highlights examples of how Kentucky higher education is getting it right.**

## America’s First Research University

But the more I researched the role of universities in their respective states and within this part of the country, the more I was drawn to the story of the founding of America’s first research university in 1876: Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Mr. Johns Hopkins, a lifelong bachelor who designated nearly three-quarters of his accumulated wealth for “these two children of mine, a university and a hospital,” helped fund what is arguably one of most remarkable institutions in the world. Having made his fortune through investments in the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the abolitionist Hopkins left funds for his extended family and many other worthy causes in and around his adopted city of Baltimore, with the remaining \$7 million earmarked for a university and hospital that would bear his name. The heftiest gift in the history of American higher education to that date, Hopkins’s generosity would be the equivalent of a \$150 million gift today. And now, more than 140 years hence, the estimated value of the Hopkins endowment, together with its assets, is in excess of \$12 billion.

The university’s first president, Daniel Coit Gilman, said in his inaugural address in 1876, “So far as I can learn, the Hopkins foundation, coming from a single giver, is without parallel



in terms or in amount in this or any other land.” The result was a sea change in the American university. Under the leadership of Gilman, Johns Hopkins infused bona fide research into the core identity of modern academe. “If any single development had shifted values in American higher education, it was the remarkable success of Johns Hopkins,” wrote Roger L. Geiger, distinguished professor of higher education at Pennsylvania State University.<sup>2</sup> Professor John Thelin of the University of Kentucky, observed that Gilman’s work, vision, and temerity “brought to fruition the quest for a genuine modern American university.”<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Hopkins’s gift in 1873 propelled American higher education to generate life-altering discoveries, and this tradition lives on. Four current faculty at Hopkins are Nobel laureates; they are among the 27 people with ties to the institution to have received a Nobel Prize. According to numbers from the National Science Foundation, for nearly four decades in a row, Johns Hopkins has led the nation in the amount of institutional dollars spent on research and development, coming in at \$2.43 billion in fiscal year 2016. The next institution in the ranking,

the University of Michigan, spent about \$1 billion less. A separate listing reported that Johns Hopkins University surpassed the \$2 billion mark in research funded by federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health in fiscal year 2016. The institution following Johns Hopkins, the University of Washington in Seattle, was just shy of \$1 billion. Every member of our society benefits when the maximum number of citizens obtains as much education as they can, rendering even more true the axiom that higher education in America must be viewed as a public good rather than a private benefit. Further, I would argue that an institution like Johns Hopkins, the University of Kentucky, and even a teaching institution like Eastern Kentucky University—with all the collateral benefits accruing to the world from its discoveries, research and innovations—should be applauded when it chooses to focus resources and the talents of its faculty members, administrators, and students on addressing the intractable challenges facing our globe today.

## Daniel Coit Gilman

I am honored that my next book project, under contract with Johns Hopkins University Press (which, by the way, was the first university press founded in America by Gilman in 1878), is a biography of Mr. Gilman. A Yale-trained geographer who served as head librarian at Yale before becoming the third president of the University of California, Gilman was the unanimous pick of the Hopkins’ trustees in 1874 to serve as the institution’s first president. His remarkable tenure at Hopkins lasted 25 years, after which Andrew Carnegie recruited him to be the first president of the Carnegie Institution in Washington, D.C. He died unexpectedly, shortly after returning from one of his many trips to Europe, in his hometown of Norwich, Connecticut, in 1908.

“The Academy should make for less misery among the poor, less ignorance in the schools, less suffering in the hospital, less fraud in business, [and] less folly in politics.” That statement was made in 1876 by Gilman at his Hopkins inauguration. In the ensuing 143 years, the Academy certainly has made *some* strides forward but has much still to do to fulfill the vision of President Gilman. Given the state of politics in America today, I would hazard the opinion that we have much to do in relation to the last of Gilman’s aspirations for higher education.

In communities throughout our country, there are examples of local townsfolk who rose up—decades or even centuries ago—to establish fledgling institutions of higher education, particularly right here in Kentucky. From Morehead to Murray, Louisville to Lexington, Berea to Bowling Green—and all points in between—each and every one of us is a beneficiary of Kentucky’s remarkable higher education tradition. Our forebearers sacrificed greatly with a belief that these institutions and the

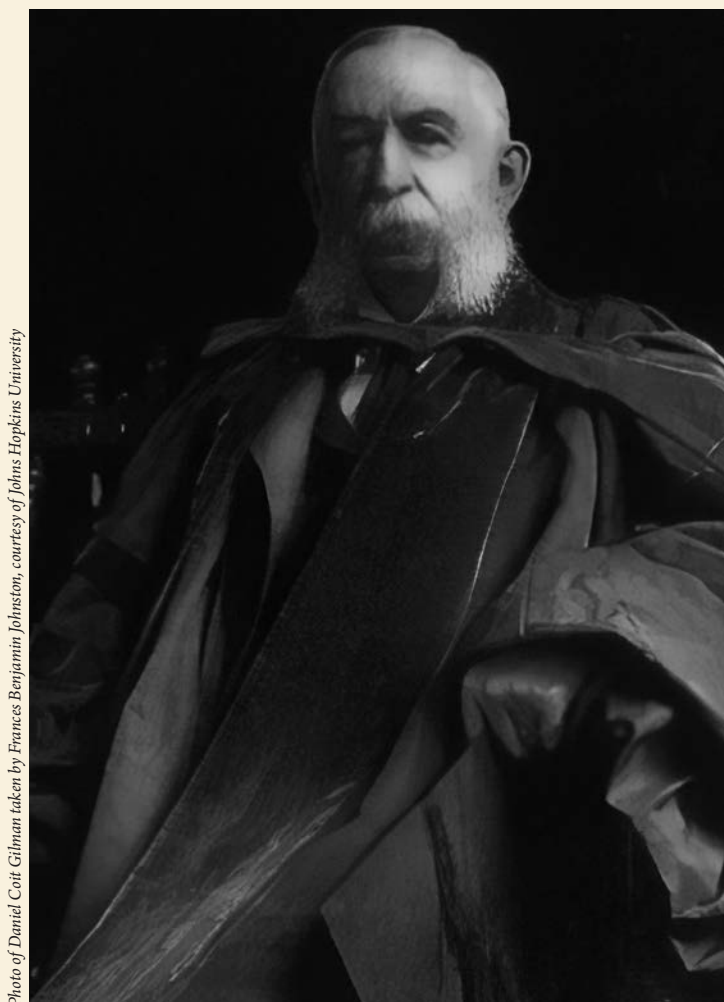
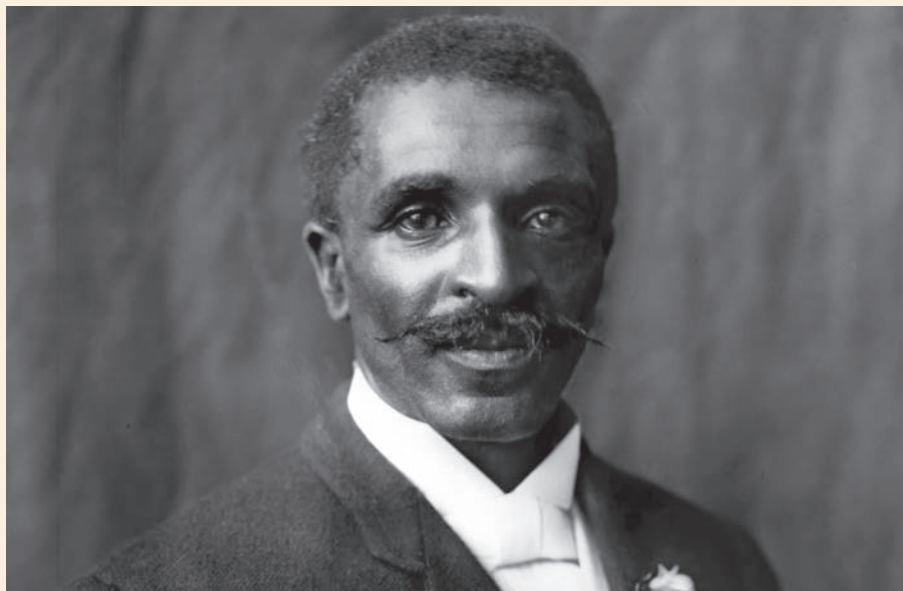


Photo of Daniel Coit Gilman taken by Frances Benjamin Johnston, courtesy of Johns Hopkins University

**Daniel Coit Gilman was the first president of Johns Hopkins University, where he served for 25 years. Following his tenure in Baltimore, he was selected to be the first president of the Carnegie Institution in Washington, D.C.**

George Washington Carver was a scientist and educator. In 1890, he began studying art and music at Simpson College in Iowa. Carver then moved to Ames and began his botanical studies as the first black student at Iowa State. Carver established a reputation as a brilliant botanist and became famous for many inventions including a number of uses for the peanut.



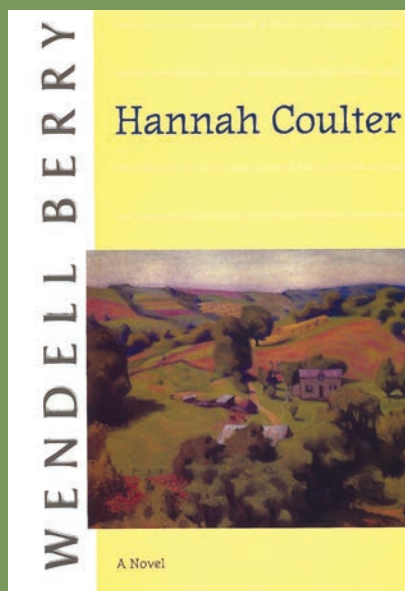
education they provided opened the portal to a better life. Study after study reveals that the one great leveling influence to determine the ability to succeed is the level of education to which one attains. The formula is simple: invest more in acquiring as much knowledge and skill as possible and success will invariably follow. Recent data reveals that quality of life is directly proportional to the amount of education one receives and further translates into better health, increased earning potential, and more desire to participate civically and to give back to one's community. This is the rich Kentucky higher education that you and I have inherited from our ancestors and which, in turn, has provided countless citizens of our Commonwealth the means whereby lives have been transformed and trajectories inexorably altered. And no one put it more profoundly or succinctly than George Washington Carver: "Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom."

## About the Author

Michael T. Benson is president and professor of government at Eastern Kentucky University. He is the author (with Hal R. Boyd) of *College for the Commonwealth: The Case for Higher Education in American Democracy*. His next book, *Every Epoch Requires a Fresh Start: Daniel Coit Gilman and the Birth of the Modern American Research University* will be released by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2022.

## Notes


- <sup>1</sup> James C. Klotter, "Lost Opportunities," speech in possession of author, June 2015.
- <sup>2</sup> Geiger, Roger L., ed. *The American College in the Nineteenth Century*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000. 27.
- <sup>3</sup> Thelin, John R. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. 103.

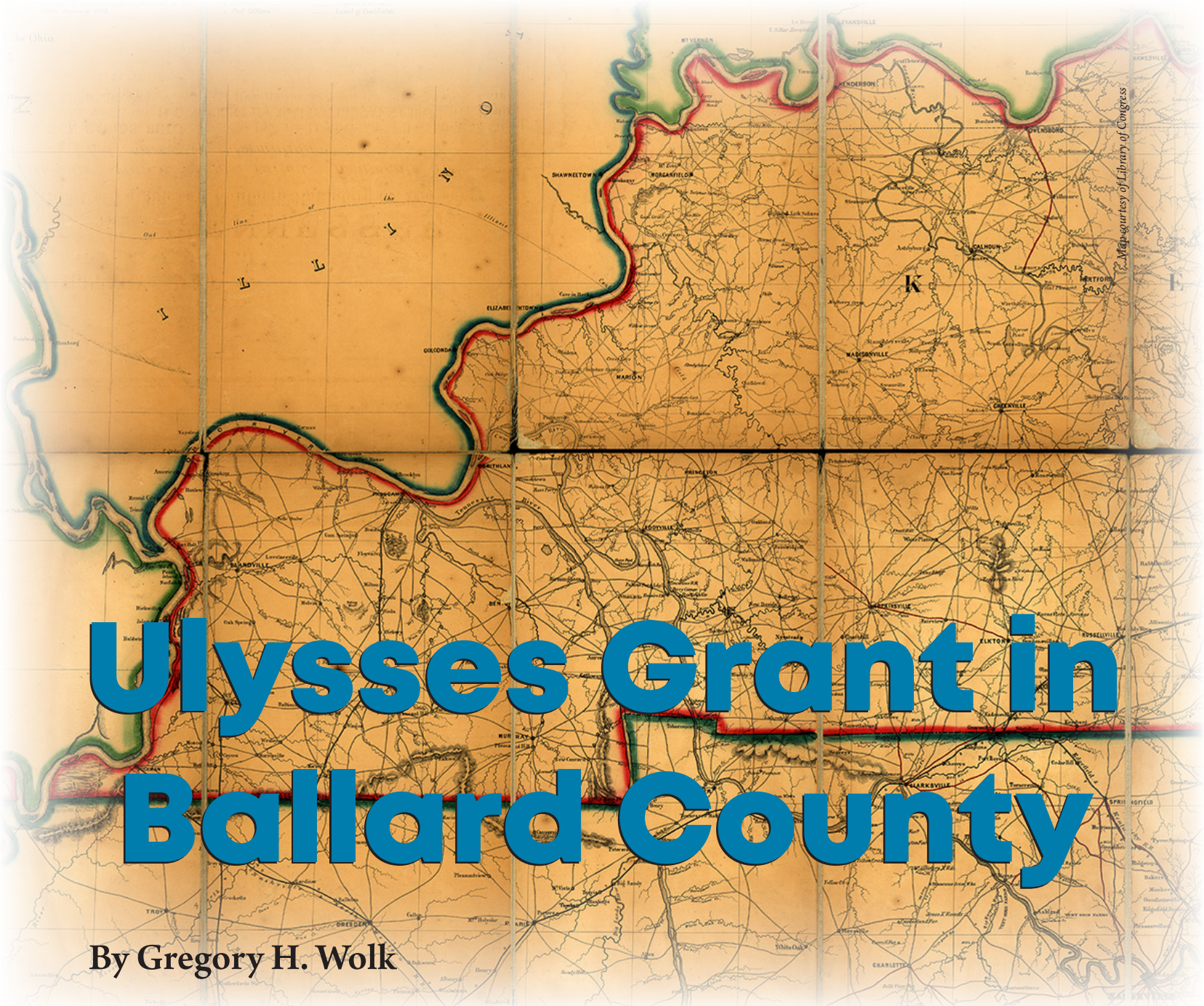


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# Ulysses Grant in Ballard County

By Gregory H. Wolk

**C**olonel Ulysses Grant began his career as a Civil War commander on July 3, 1861, when he led his first regiment in a march west out of Springfield, Illinois. He was posted in a number of places in Missouri during the following two months, and rose to the rank of brigadier general. Grant first arrived in Kentucky on September 5, 1861, when he (with two regiments of Union soldiers) took possession of Paducah. That same day General Grant returned to his base at Cairo, Illinois. On November 7, 1861, Grant fought his first Civil War battle while in command in the field, at Belmont, Missouri. Although this battle was in the very shadow of the heights at Columbus, Kentucky, which had been fortified by the Confederates, Grant did not then enter Kentucky. His command was repulsed on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, and once again Grant returned to his Cairo base. The Confederates remained in control of the Columbus fortifications, and with them control of maritime traffic on the Mississippi. Grant visited Paducah from time to time, where General Charles F. Smith was in command of the Union garrison under Grant's authority. Ulysses Grant first stepped on the soil of inland Kentucky on January 15, 1862.

On January 27, 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued his General War Order Number 1, which said: "Ordered that the 22nd day of February 1862, be the day for a general movement of the Land and Naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces." This order was born largely out of the President's frustration with his then General-in-Chief, George Brinton McClellan. After the Union disaster at Bull Run, July 21, 1861, McClellan obstinately failed to move his armies in the East. The Union armies in the western theatre of the War, however, did not need prodding.

Indeed, history records that on February 16, 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant captured an entire Confederate Army near the southern border of Kentucky, at the Battle of Fort Donelson, Tennessee. Six days before the date McClellan was to begin his general movement, Grant achieved this singular accomplishment, one that ended forever the years Grant lived in obscurity, years peppered with personal failures.

The campaign for Fort Donelson began on January 6, 1862, when orders reached Grant's headquarters in Cairo. On that day, Grant's superior officer, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, directed that Grant commence a reconnaissance in force, to probe in the direction of Mayfield and Murray and to test Confederate strength.

Lincoln's attention then was focused on Confederate troops in eastern Kentucky, and Lincoln (and McClelland, too) felt that a movement was needed in western Kentucky in order to freeze in place the Confederate troops there. Halleck was not enthused about sending troops to Kentucky which he needed to defend Missouri. To magnify the impact of what Halleck designed to be a limited mission, he directed that Grant make it known that his objective was "Dover." Halleck noted that Grant should let the newspapers know that he was moving on Nashville, and he went so far as to admonish Grant "to deceive your own men as well as the enemy." Auspiciously, Dover, Tennessee, was the location of Confederate Fort Donelson, where Confederates were working furiously with slave labor to finish a bulwark to protect Nashville.

Grant's commander in Paducah, C. F. Smith, marched off for Mayfield and Murray on January 14. Grant also placed a force of 6,000 men, commanded by Illinois General John A. McClernand, on the ground in Ballard County. McClernand occupied the site of old Fort Jefferson, just south of Wycliffe, Kentucky, a remnant of George Rogers Clark's western campaign during the Revolution. McClernand's force then moved eight miles east to the town of Blandville, the county seat of Ballard County.

Photo courtesy of Library Special Collections, WKU



General Grant's bodyguard and Union troops pass over the Mayfield Bridge headed toward Columbus, Kentucky.



Herman Cothe died in 1859 at the age of 43 while in Ballard County. He is buried at the Blandville Cemetery.

On January 15, 1862, a Wednesday, Grant arrived in person at Fort Jefferson, joining 2,000 Union soldiers that he had ordered there to relieve McClernand's troops. Grant's movements on the 15th are not entirely clear, but by the end of the day he appeared in Weston's Crossroads (now Bardwell) to review McClernand's troops, which had during the day moved from Blandville. Except for cavalry scouts, this is the closest that McClernand or Grant would approach the rear of the Confederate entrenchments at Columbus. General Grant proceeded to Blandville, and there established his headquarters "in the field," at a place on the north bank of Mayfield Creek known as Cothes Mill.<sup>1</sup> Consistent with the plan sketched out by Halleck, McClernand moved in the direction of Mayfield, stopping first at Milburn. McClernand then returned north to the neighborhood of Blandville, arriving there with most of his command on January 18, 1862.

Ulysses Grant spent much of Thursday, January 16, in the saddle. Together with his staff and a company of cavalry, he reconnoitered east and upstream along Mayfield Creek, clocking in his judgment 35 miles that day. Mayfield Creek was swollen that mid-January, and virtually unfordable as far as Grant would follow it upstream. Even where it could be forded, in Grant's words the water "[was] up to the saddle-skirts."<sup>2</sup> Also during his brief stay at Cothes Mill, Grant (on Friday the 17th) rode west to the mouth of Mayfield Creek, and may have obtained transportation by river steamer to Fort Jefferson at the end of that day. Grant arrived back at his permanent headquarters in Cairo on the evening of January 20, 1862.

When the intelligence gleaned from General Smith's expedition to Murray

arrived in Grant's hands a few days after he reached Cairo, Grant moved quickly to obtain Halleck's permission to mount an attack on Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee. The permission came on January 30; by the evening of February 3, 1862, Grant had 15,000 troops in Paducah, transport boats at the ready.

## Postscript

*New York Times* correspondent Franc B. Wilkie was with the Union columns moving about Ballard County in January, 1862. On January 26, the *Times* published a curious

<sup>1</sup> Much of the chronology of Grant's days in Ballard County have been derived from his January 17 report to Army headquarters in St. Louis. There he described his destination on the 15th as "Coathe's Mill." The proper spelling is Cothe, from mill owner Herman Cothe, who passed away in 1859 and is buried in Blandville Cemetery. The place where Grant camped is south of Kentucky Route 121, about a mile southwest of Blandville.

<sup>2</sup> Grant reports that on Friday the 17th he reconnoitered roads south of Mayfield Creek to its mouth at the Mississippi River, which leads to a reasonable supposition that his route on the 16th was along the north side of the creek and east of Blandville. If so, his round trip upstream that day should have taken him to the vicinity of Melber in southern McCracken County.





story by Wilkie, concerning the fate of Cothes Mill near Blandville. Herman Cothe's widow, Ann, married a man named James O'Neill.<sup>3</sup> In Wilkie's words, O'Neill was "a fellow of expensive habits and small sense," who was running through Ann's property at an alarming rate. O'Neill was suspected of furnishing lumber to the Confederates holding Columbus. As the last regiment of Union troops prepared to leave Blandville to return to Cairo, an aide to Grant wrote to General McClelland. He suggested that if square timber suitable for building artillery casements was found on site, McClelland's troops ought to burn the lumber and remove parts of the mill machinery "as will render it useless for the present." Instead, the Union troops burned Cothes Mill to the ground.

The *Times* article opens a window on the struggles of civilians who were "caught in the middle" in time of war. In 1884, the surviving children of Herman and Ann Cothe filed a claim against the government for loss of the mill, and for horses, mules, oxen, wagons, and so forth, appropriated during General Grant's occupation of the Cothe property. The heirs of Herman Cothe ranged in age from 11 to 16 when the mill burned. The matter was referred to the Quartermaster-General of the Army, who took testimony and issued a report in March, 1890. The evidence showed that James O'Neill might well have harbored southern

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<sup>3</sup> O'Neill's name is variously spelled O'Neal or Oneal in the official records of the War.

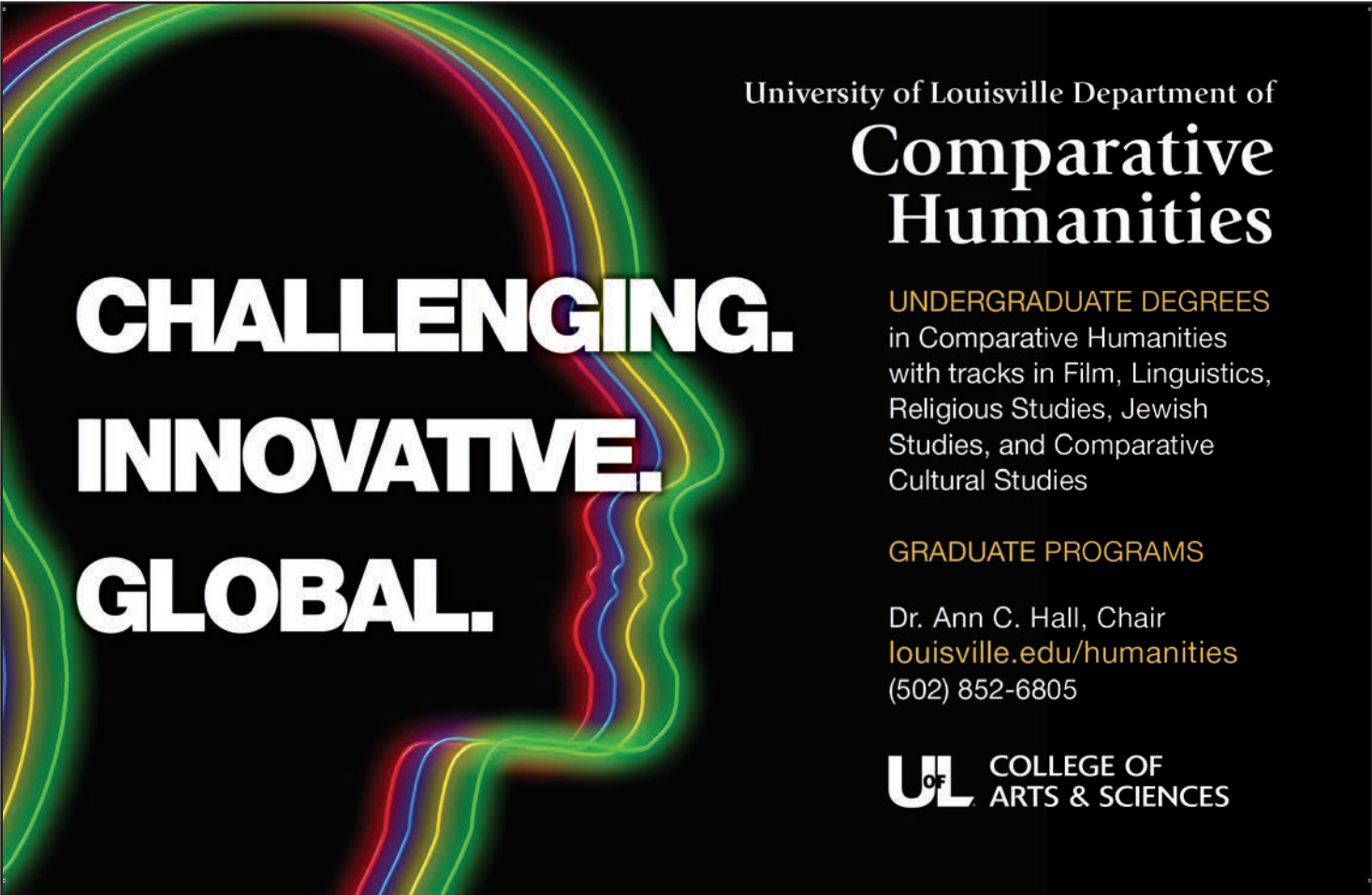
sympathies, but it was conceded that he was not a title owner to the property. It was also conceded that the children were not capable of forming political views in 1862. Herman Cothe died more than a year before the Civil War erupted and Ann O'Neill had died in 1871. In the last analysis, in the view of the Quartermaster-General's investigator, what the army took or destroyed on January 20, 1862, was neither quartermaster stores nor commissary supplies, and the law did not contain or contemplate a remedy for the Cothe children. Nearly 30 years after the Civil War visited Blandville, the Cothe family was still living with the War's consequences.

## About the Author

Gregory H. Wolk of St. Louis is the Heritage Programs Coordinator for Missouri Humanities. A lawyer by profession, Greg has been involved in Civil War tourism ventures in Missouri since 2001. He is the author of *Friend and Foe Alike: A Tour Guide to Missouri's Civil War*, an exhaustive study of 235 sites in Missouri that was published in 2010 and is now in its second edition.

## Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank Margaret Dunn of Paducah and the Ballard-Carlisle Historical Society for their invaluable assistance in locating the site of Grant's camp on the banks of Mayfield Creek.



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# “The Free Slave Farm” in Meade County

## Helping to Define Kentucky’s Ambiguity Toward Slavery

By Dr. Marshall Myers

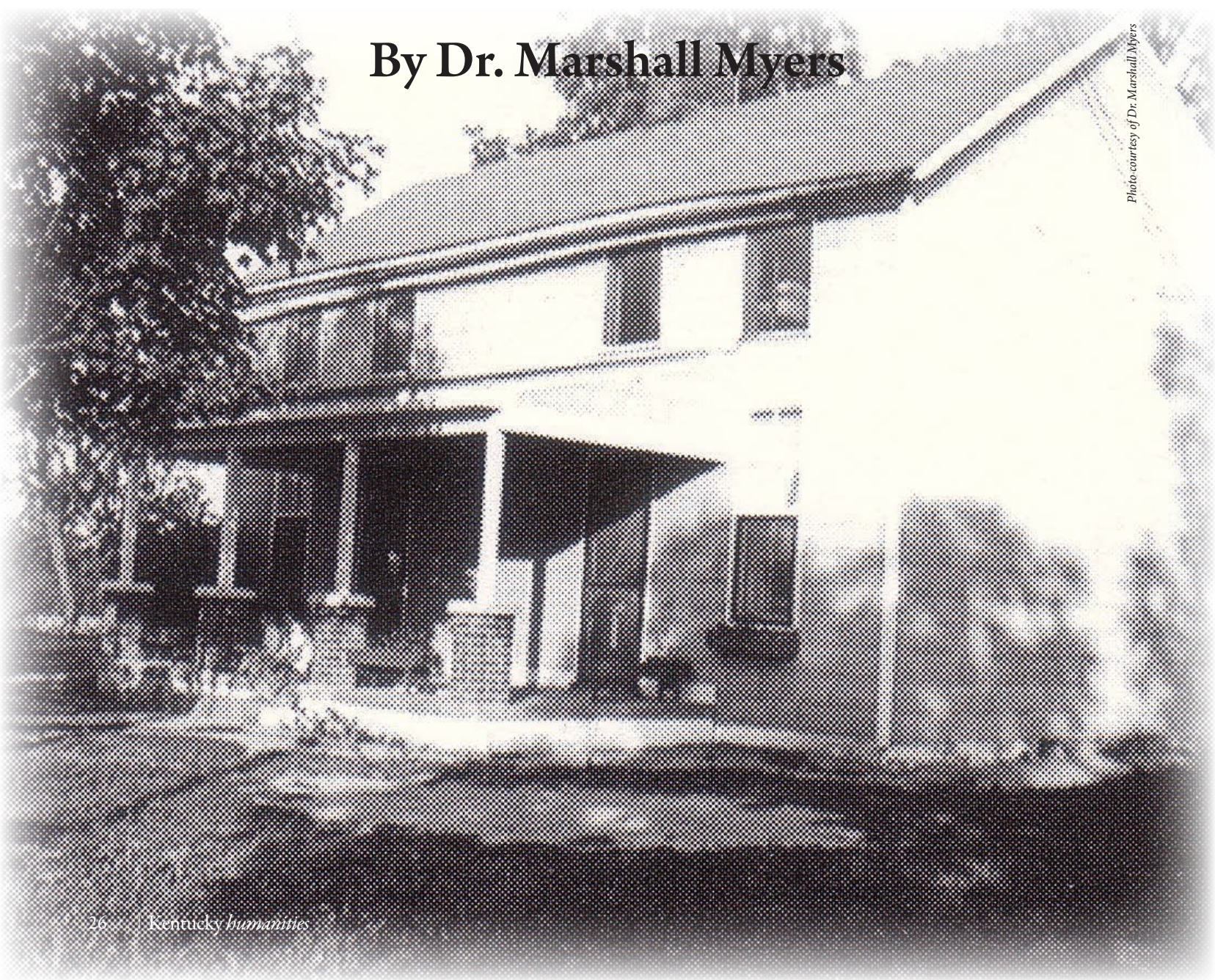


Photo courtesy of Dr. Marshall Myers

Kentucky's stance toward slavery in the 19th century is unclear to most residents of the Commonwealth.

On the one hand, slavery was legal in Kentucky throughout the Civil War even though Kentucky never joined the Confederacy. In fact, Kentucky didn't ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, an amendment outlawing slavery in the United States, until March 18, 1976.

Kentucky had more slave owners than any other state except for Virginia and Georgia, but each slave owner in Kentucky had only four or five slaves.

In 1860, near the start of the Civil War, Kentucky held 225,483 slaves, more than Texas and Florida, states that joined the Confederacy.

On the other hand, as Professor Harold D. Tallant makes clear in his book *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky*, most Kentuckians at the time regarded slavery as an "evil necessity," something that kept Kentucky's economic engine running smoothly, while many in the Commonwealth, as well as many others throughout the South, believed that slavery itself restrained slaves and made them peaceful and law-abiding, fearing slave insurrections, like the famous Nat Turner Insurrection or John Brown's ill-fated attempt to free all the slaves.

Yet, unlike in the deep South, few supporters of slavery in Kentucky thought that it somehow was a good thing; that slavery was justified because it brought Christianity and civilization to the heathen Africans.

### **Kentucky Had a Place for Free Slaves**

Some historians have concluded that slavery was milder in Kentucky than in the "cotton states." Others have argued the opposite. Yet in spite of the ambivalence, there was a place where slaves who had bought or won their freedom could live out their lives as free men and women.

That place was in Meade County, Kentucky, near what is now the Fort Knox installation.

But much ambiguity surrounds the farm, including who originally founded it.

### **The "Major Braddock" Story**

One story has romance, and a swashbuckling Indian fighter named "Major Braddock," a body servant to Edward Braddock, a British general during the French and Indian War. Unfortunately, the British General met his fate on the battlefield in 1756. With the real General Braddock dead, Benjamin O. Davis assumed his name, and was given his freedom after he proved to his owner Jacob Van Meter that he had killed 10 Indians. Van Meter brought Braddock to Kentucky in 1779 and freed him in 1797.

### **"Major Braddock" the Remarkable Indian Fighter**

Paul Urbahns described this astute Indian fighter and hero as "a man of powerful build, with a very intelligent face and head. He could read and write well and is credited with being a very fast runner."

"General Braddock," in his role as a free man, bought land in Meade County and was the founder of the Free Slave Farm, so the story goes. In fact, many believed that General Braddock is buried on the same farm in an unmarked grave. Others, however, say he lies in the Mill Creek Cemetery on the Fort Knox reservation.

General Braddock's exciting exploits and ownership of the Free Slave Farm make for an intriguing story, indeed. In any event, it seems the tale of the famous Indian fighter was confused with another story about the farm's founding.

### **The Other Story of The Free Slave Farm**

With county records to support it, a free negro, described as "a free man of Colour," named Pleasant Moreman, one of 16 Blacks and five free mulattoes in Meade County in 1850, bought the farm on February 24, 1847 for \$225. The sale is mentioned as a part of the estate of Robert Oliver, a large land developer in the area.

**Left: County records support the story that Pleasant Moreman, described as "a free man of Colour," bought the farm located in Meade County, Kentucky, on February 24, 1847 for \$225.**

The census of 1850 designated that Pleasant Moreman was (B), that is, a Black, living with his wife, Jemima, who went by Mima, and a daughter, Catherine, aged 22. Part of the land was later sold in three-acre plots to Eugene Jones and Lee Norris who may have been residents of the farm itself, but the 1870 census lists none of the 1850 residents.

While it may be true that the censuses of 1850 and 1860 list no other residents of the farm than Pleasant, Mima, and Catherine, that oversight may have been because the residents were black so they were not seen as eligible to be counted by the white census takers.

However, in 1866, after emancipation, six black children were assigned to various white individuals in Meade County. The children were listed as apprentices, according to research done by Carolyn Wimp. They, too, may have lived on the farm.

When the Greenwell brothers bought parts of the land in 1947, the farm was dotted with many out-buildings that seemed to be for animals. Some would be for hogs, some for sheep, and some for various other animals, supporting the idea that the farm was, at one time, home to a variety of different animals.

There was a cemetery located on part of the land now owned by Francis Greenwell. The cemetery housed two marked tombstones, one listed as Pleasant Moreman, who died on January 11, 1869; the other his wife, Mima, who passed away on August 18, 1867. Other parts of the property belonged to Francis' brothers.

Until 1931, the farm itself was owned by the Moreman family and its descendants. At sale, the place featured a white frame house, in part torn down by Francis Greenwell and a new house was then built on the same spot.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Marshall Myers

### Why The Free Slave Farm Is Significant

The farm's significance lies in the fact that it existed during a time in the county when slavery was legal and there were so few free negroes.

In order to buy his freedom, a slave would have to earn money from extra labor, be set free by his master, or at his master's death. In any event, being granted his freedom would have been unusual.

But a former slave ordinarily would have also been at risk of being captured by sinister forces and being returned to slavery. A freed slave was in constant danger of being snatched up, only to find himself or herself a slave again.

Although they were regarded as odious members of society, slave catchers often roamed throughout the state with the intent of catching slaves without proof that their status was free. Records show that a slave catcher did on several occasions visit Meade County.

### The Free Slave Farm Was Probably a Subsistence Farm

At any rate, several sources describe the farm as not a farm in the usual sense where crops or animals were grown for sale.

Today, we think of a farm as a place where a family earns a living, selling produce grown or produced on the farm. A wheat farmer, for example, would rely on income from his or her sale of wheat. A cattle farmer would derive his or her income by the sale of cattle. The Free Slave Farm was probably instead what was common in generations past: a subsistence farm.

**The tombstones of Pleasant Moreman (left), who died on January 11, 1869, and his wife, Mima (above), who died on August 18, 1867 were located on the property owned by Francis Greenwell.**



A subsistence farm is an agricultural plot where the residents grow or manufacture all their needs. For example, they grew flax for linen for clothing, planted sorghum for sweetening, and raised hogs and cattle for meat. Sometimes called plain folk, many subsistence farmers spread across the early landscape of America where they were the norm, not the exception. In a word, these subsistence farmers were self-sufficient.

If residents needed money at all they sold an animal or another product to pay taxes or mortgages. The people there raised many different kinds of crops and animals, accounting for the many pens for hogs, sheep, and cattle. Several smaller fields were devoted to vegetable crops which were either canned or stored in various places, like burying cabbage.

### Conclusion

We do not know how many free slaves lived on the farm. The 1850 census just cites three people, but the census of 1870 lists no residents.

While much ambiguity surrounded the institution of slavery in Kentucky, with slavery an ominous practice to many and in general confusion among many others, the state can boast that there was a place beyond slavery where freed slaves could live out their days in peace and harmony—a flicker of light amid the deep darkness of slavery. In the early spring with the

soil still cold, the free slaves would plant their crops or tend to the animals, a part of the great cycle of growing and minding the crops and animals. Like many others, white and black, they scratched out a living from the freshly plowed earth.

In many ways, then, the Free Slave Farm spoke loudly to people in a muddle of confusion about just what slavery meant to these 19th century Kentuckians.

### About the Author

Retired in 2012, Dr. Marshall Myers was coordinator of composition and full professor at Eastern Kentucky University in the Department of English. He has published more than 300 articles, scholarly pieces, poems, and short stories. Dr. Myers has authored two books on the Civil War in Kentucky: *Great Civil War Stories of Kentucky* and *Neither Blue Nor Gray*. His book, *Only in Old Kentucky: Historic True Tales of Cultural Ingenuity*, continues the theme of early Kentuckians “making do” in their circumstances. Raised in rural Meade County, Dr. Myers received a B.A. in English from Kentucky Wesleyan College, an M.A. in English from Eastern Kentucky University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Louisville.

### Author’s Note

To Jon Whitfield.

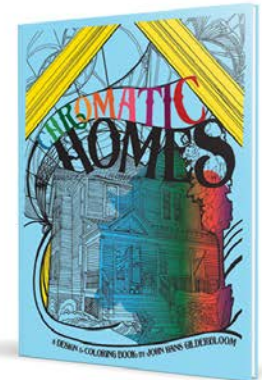


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# What Books Have Meant to Me

By Georgia Green Stamper

**O**ur youngest grandchild, Georgia Jane, is learning to read. She's in kindergarten at a shiny-new school filled with the most up-to-date everything. Seven hundred students, in grades K–5, learn with her. Like a traveler from a foreign country, I attempt to tell her about my first school although she stares back at me with uncomprehending eyes. She cannot imagine such a strange place.

New Columbus had only three teachers and an enrollment of about 70 students in eight grades. Nothing was shiny about it, from the dusty pine floors held in check by a layer of black oil, to the coal-burning stoves that hunkered in the corner of each classroom. Nothing was up-to-date even for 1951. We did not have a water fountain, but drank with a dipper from a bucket of cistern water. We went to the toilet in an outhouse out back. We didn't have a cafeteria. We hung our jackets on hooks in an anteroom quaintly called a "cloakroom." And yet, we learned to read from books just as Georgia Jane is doing.

My first-grade teacher, Miz Zell True, may have been a religious fanatic. I prefer to think of her as devout. What I remember is that she talked about miracles a lot, about Daniel in the lion's den, about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and that she taught me to read. I thought then, and still do now, that a love of books was the miracle Miz Zell asked God to grant to me.

I knew on some primitive level that language distinguished us from the cows and sheep on our farm. Talking to each other was a large part of what it meant to be human. Even those I knew who were deaf, like our neighbor's little girl, or mentally impaired like my mother's friend Elizabeth, sought ways to "talk." Now, as a reader, I had cracked the code of written language. I, a little Kentucky girl who lived at a crossroads called Natlee that you couldn't even find when you were standing right there, much less on a map—I could join a world-wide conversation.

Like the ancients around their prehistoric campfire, I began with stories that entertained me. Mine were simple ones like *The Bobbsey Twins* and *Nancy Drew* mysteries. In third grade the bookmobile pulled into my world, and lured me to the inspiring shelves of blue-bound biographies about America's heroes and great innovators. I also learned to read for information, about dinosaurs, about history in the *Little House on the Prairie* books, and about a gazillion other topics.

By seventh grade, felled by a flu that lingered for weeks, I began to plow through my father's bookshelf of classics, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The*

*Picture of Dorian Gray* . . . Story made room for character and theme. My understanding of the world grew more complex.

In our small high school, excellent English teachers like Joanne DeWitt and Eileen Morgan led me through samplers of the best of the best. (Am I the only one who hoards her school-day anthologies as though they were rare books?) In college, I declared as an English major the first week and never looked back. I entered higher education when classical surveys of English, American, and World literature were still mandatory—my professors pushed me into the deep waters of the canon, their method of teaching me to swim.

I won't belabor my lifetime syllabus, here, because—and I'm not being disingenuous—I am embarrassed that it isn't longer. Still, as a reader, I've probably met every kind of person who ever was, and I've vicariously lived through most every human condition. I have stepped outside of myself, beyond my narrow place, and though I cannot see with the eye of God, I have caught a glimpse of all humanity.

As a young high school English teacher, I stumbled across something Jesse Stuart wrote for the introduction of our textbook. I read it to my students with tears in my eyes and they thought, rightfully, that I was a little crazy because I *do* get crazy when I talk about the miracle of written language. But old Jesse had nailed what I'd been fumbling to tell them, and what I awkwardly try now to explain to my young granddaughter, Georgia Jane:

*Monuments fall, nations perish. Civilizations grow old and die out. And after an era of darkness new races build others. But in the world of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again, and yet live on still young, still as fresh as the day they were written, still telling men's hearts of the hearts of men centuries dead.*

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## About the Author

Georgia Green Stamper is a seventh-generation Kentuckian. A graduate of Transylvania University, Stamper is a former high school English and theater teacher and speech team coach. Her published works include *Butter in the Morning* and *You Can Go Anywhere*. She also writes a bi-weekly column, "Georgia: On My Mind," for *The Owenton News-Herald*. She has been a regular commentator for NPR member station WUKY affiliated with the University of Kentucky.



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