

# Kentucky

Spring 2022  
Kentucky Humanities

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Telling Kentucky's Story!*

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# Kentucky

Spring 2022

## humanities



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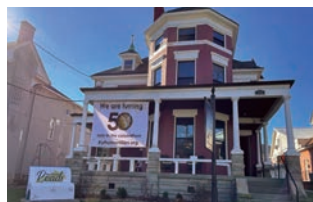


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# Celebrating 50 Years

This is an exciting year as Kentucky Humanities commemorates 50 years of *Telling Kentucky's Story!* We have a year-long celebration planned and look forward to having you join us. Find out more about upcoming anniversary events on page 6 or visit [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org) to learn more about all the ways we are celebrating half a century of bringing the humanities to citizens throughout the Commonwealth.

Dr. Melanie Beals Goan takes us on a journey back to 1972, the year Kentucky Humanities came into existence. What was going on in Kentucky? In the nation? And in the world? Find out more about life 50 years ago beginning on page 8.

State humanities councils were developed as part of an experiment, a means to help the National Endowment for the Humanities to bring the humanities to people across the country. But it didn't happen overnight. Esther Farrington tells us more about this experiment and the creation of the state humanities councils on page 12.

Kentucky Humanities was founded in 1972, when five Kentucky scholars were invited to Washington to learn about the opportunity to begin a humanities agency in the state. Former Kentucky Humanities Executive Director Dr. Virginia Carter shares with us the story of how Kentucky Humanities began and just how far we have come over the last 50 years. It is a fascinating story you don't want to miss. Be sure to check it out on page 16.

We continue sharing some of the highlights from the 50-year history of Kentucky Humanities on page 22. From our many office locations graciously provided by the University of Kentucky, to the evolution of programs offered by Kentucky Humanities, the timeline beginning on page 22 shares a glimpse of 50 years of Kentucky Humanities serving the Commonwealth.

Since 1972, Kentucky has experienced a literary renaissance! Dr. Morris A. Grubbs celebrates Kentucky writers and reminds us that we are blessed with an abundance of literary wealth here in Kentucky. Enjoy this celebration of Kentucky writers beginning on page 33.

Kentucky Humanities has been *Telling Kentucky's Story* for 50 years! Your story is part of Kentucky's story. On page 38, Georgia Green Stamper reminds us of the importance of telling our stories and why each one is an integral part of the fabric of our communities and our Commonwealth.

I hope you enjoy this anniversary issue of *Kentucky Humanities* and that you will share it with your friends. In this year of celebration, we want to hear your Kentucky stories. If you have a story to share, please 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 fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.



Murray State's NPR Station



# Sharing Kentucky's Stories

Covering a changing region & agriculture and infrastructure

Daily news and state politics

Stories of ongoing tornado recovery efforts & resilience

RFA Corps Member covering income disparity and social access begins this summer



*See the news at [wkms.org](http://wkms.org)*



## MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

rivers & the stories that lie beneath the surface



**SEASON 2 EPISODES OUT NOW**



TELLING KENTUCKY'S STORY | *council pages*

We are 50!

Since 1972, Kentucky Humanities has been dedicated to *Telling Kentucky's Story*. To commemorate this momentous occasion, we have planned a year-long 50th Anniversary celebration. If you missed our first two anniversary events, there is still time to join in the celebration! Stay up to date on our 50th Anniversary celebration, and all of our programs, at [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org).

*New Grass in the Bluegrass*

**Sam Bush in conversation  
with Michael Johnathon  
June 7<sup>th</sup> in Owensboro**

*Harmonizing Stories*

**Linkin' Bridge in conversation  
with Aminata Cairo  
July 15<sup>th</sup> in Louisville**

*Recipes from the River*

**Chefs Sara Bradley, Regina Charboneau,  
Phillip Ashley Rix, & John Varanese  
September 17<sup>th</sup> in Paducah**

*Mission: Humanities*

**Astronaut Story Musgrave in  
conversation with Kris Kimel  
October 13<sup>th</sup> in Lexington**

## Andrew Reed joins Kentucky Humanities Board



Andrew Reed, Associate Professor at the University of Pikeville, has been elected to serve on the Kentucky Humanities board of directors at the October 2021 Board Meeting. Reed will serve a three-year term, with a second three-year term optional. As a member of the 23-person volunteer board of directors, Reed 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. He also served as the scholar for the Prime Time Family Reading® program at the Pike County Public Library in March.

Since 2014, Andrew Reed has been an Associate Professor of Film and Media Arts and Program Coordinator of the Film and Media Arts program at the University of Pikeville. He has taught classes including Broadcast Journalism, History of Electronic Communication, Introduction to Film & Media Arts, Digital Imaging, Scriptwriting, Digital Film Production, and Intermediate Broadcasting, among many others.

Prior to joining the faculty at UPIKE, Reed was an Instructor at the University of Alabama, an Adjunct Instructor at the University of North Alabama, and a Lab Instructor and Teaching Assistant at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Reed holds a bachelor of science degree in communication arts from the University of North Alabama, a master of arts from the University of Alabama, a master of fine arts from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and a master of business administration from the University of Pikeville.

## Bring the Smithsonian to Your Community

The story of human history is written in inventions and innovations. People are problem-solvers. Sometimes we invent. More often, we innovate—we introduce a fresh idea or an invention into use in some way that creates a new way of doing or thinking.

Invention can happen anywhere and it's happening right now in small towns across America. Rural Americans are creating new products, taking risks, meeting challenges together, and seizing upon exciting opportunities that change local life and sometimes reach far beyond.

*Spark! Places of Innovation* will highlight innovation in rural America from the perspective of the people who lived it! Their words, images, and experiences gathered through an ambitious crowdsourcing initiative will be the heartbeat of the exhibition. Technical, social, cultural, artistic, or a combination of all of these—every innovation is as unique as each community. Explore the diversity, ingenuity, and tenacity of rural Americans in *Spark! Places of Innovation*.

*Spark! Places of Innovation* explores the unique combination of places, people, and circumstances that sparks innovation and invention in rural communities. Inspired by an exhibition by the National Museum of American History, the exhibition features stories gathered from diverse communities across the nation. Photographs, engaging interactives, objects, videos, and augmented reality bring a multilayered experience to reveal the leaders, challenges, successes, and future of innovation in each town.

*Spark! Places of Innovation* will be the springboard for diverse local programming in the humanities, sciences, and arts. Visitors will be inspired to learn about innovation has shaped their own communities and how they may be innovators themselves. Community members will come together in conversation about their history, present, and future.

This exhibit will explore questions including:

- What is the role of creative thinkers and inventors in a town?
- What resources do towns have for innovation and invention?
- How important is the role of self-expression and openness to change?
- How does a place encourage risk-taking?
- How can diversity spark innovation?

Kentucky Humanities will be sponsoring a tour of the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit *Spark! Places of Innovation* in 2023.

We are currently accepting applications from museums, libraries, and community centers that have exhibit space to host *Spark! Places of Innovation*. Applications will be accepted until **Tuesday, May 31, 2022**.

For more information on the specific requirements and to apply to host this Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit, visit [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org).



# Smithsonian

# Life in

# 1972

## *A Look Back at the Year that Kentucky Humanities Came to Be*

By Dr. Melanie Beals Goan

**Y**ou may be one of Kentucky Humanities' supporters and readers of this essay who have vivid personal memories of 1972. Perhaps, when you think back 50 years you remember junior high jitters, moving away to college, voting in your first presidential election, or your wedding day. Hearing the strains of Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face," the number one song that year, or catching a whiff of Shalimar may immediately transport you back to a high school dance. Since I was born in 1972 (happy 50th to me, too!), I cannot personally recall the ups and downs it brought, but as a 20th century U.S. historian with a focus on Kentucky history, I can share some highlights of what was happening in the Commonwealth, across the nation, and around the world during Kentucky Humanities' birth year.

In many ways, the headlines appearing in the newspaper 50 years ago sound similar to those we read on Twitter today—different media, but similar themes. Congressional redistricting was underway and many worried that partisans would rig the process. Americans were dressing in comfortable synthetics, putting away their irons, and enjoying the ease of new "perma-prest" fabrics. Olympic champions captured Americans' hearts. Inflation was squeezing struggling families and people were asking leaders to ease the pain.

In other ways, 1972 seems a world away. The average starting teacher in Kentucky earned \$6,200 annually. A gallon of gas cost 36 cents. Cigarette manufacturers advertised in newspapers. Cereal boxes included a toy. Bar codes did not exist yet, so grocery stores had to price items individually. A "giant-screen" television measured 25-inches, likely only broadcast in black and white, and only carried three network stations. Americans did not have a computer on their desk yet, let alone in their pocket or on their wrist, although the first digital watches did appear that year. No educated household was complete without a hefty set of bound encyclopedias.<sup>1</sup>

Later, as the 1970s were wrapping up, Doonesbury cartoon would ridicule it as "a kidney stone of a decade," and in many ways 1972 represents a segue to a new, gloomier era for America, marked by slipping financial prospects, international instability, and declining faith in government. A break-in at Democratic Party headquarters in June 1972 did not elicit much comment at the time—the *Courier-Journal* dismissed the "so-called 'Watergate Scandal'" as nothing more than partisan bickering—but soon enough, Americans would learn the full scope of Nixon's duplicity. That revelation, combined with the nation's failed exit from Vietnam, triggered a crisis in confidence that continues still

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<sup>1</sup> "Salary Increases, Life Insurance Policy among Teacher Legislation Passed in '72," *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, April 1, 1972, 9; "Fact #915: March 7, 2016, Average Historical Annual Gasoline Pump Price, 1929-2015." Energy.gov. Accessed February 17, 2022. <https://www.energy.gov/eere/vehicles/fact-915-march-7-2016-average-historical-annual-gasoline-pump-price-1929-2015>; and Smith's Furniture and Appliance ad, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 1, 1972, A-8.



to prey on the American psyche.<sup>2</sup>

In some ways, 1972 was the calm before the storm. It was an important year of détente and the Cold War thawed just a bit. Nixon boasted that his visit to China in February was “the week that changed the world.” It certainly surprised the world. No previous president had dared extend the olive branch to the People’s Republic for fear of appearing soft on communism. Nixon followed it with an unexpected visit to Moscow in May where he signed the SALT I treaty. Americans breathed a sigh of relief, both because the risk of nuclear annihilation had inched down slightly but also because they hoped it might cut military spending and reduce their tax bills. Nixon, the Cold Warrior, with the assistance of Kissinger made the world feel a little safer, earning the two leaders shared recognition as *TIME*’s Men of the Year.<sup>3</sup>

For several decades, Americans had been hearing news about Vietnam, and for the last five years they had been watching their neighbors, friends, and family shipped off to assist the fight. Now, finally, they could hope that the conflict was drawing to a close and that it could still end in victory. The number of soldiers “in country” was way down and peace negotiators’ optimism way up. Two years earlier, University of Kentucky students had taken to the streets to protest the war, but now the yearbook reported that anti-war activity had subsided and “the Movement” was winding down. Debate over the war still simmered, however. The “Silent Majority” deeply resented Jane Fonda’s decision to pose on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun. Though peace seemed close at hand, disagreements over the release of POWs stalled negotiators’ progress. The year ended with no resolution. The bombs continued to fall.<sup>4</sup>

An attack on the world’s oldest and most sacred contest—the Olympics—provided a stark reminder of the dangers that lurked beyond our borders. The Summer Olympics in Munich turned violent when Arab dissidents attacked Israeli athletes. In an act of protest over the loss of Palestine, Black September took nine hostages whom they later killed along with two others.



Photo courtesy of the University of Kentucky

In 1972, UK students lamented the rising cost of tuition, reporting that they were paying \$1,500 a year for tuition, room, and board.

Bombings and airplane hijackings became regular events as revolutionaries and nationalists, particularly from the Middle East, sought the world’s attention. Nothing, it seemed, was off limits when attempting to prove a point. Pilots and flight attendants called on the U.S. government to start screening air passengers and airports added metal detectors.<sup>5</sup>

War and domestic security were on the minds of American voters as they considered who their next president should be. The Democrats nominated anti-war Senator George McGovern, but voters agreed with Republican campaign advertisements that they needed “Nixon Now.” Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew won in a landslide. Pat Buchanan’s satirical summation of McGovern’s platform as “weakness abroad, permissiveness at home,” helps explain the results, but Republicans’ Southern Strategy and their decision to leverage voters’ racism also likely played a role. Sixty-four percent of Kentuckians lined up behind the incumbent. Nixon’s popularity, however, did not rub off on Louie Nunn, former Kentucky governor, who lost his race for U.S. Senate to Democrat Dee Huddleston. Huddleston claimed responsibility for removing the state sales tax on food, a move that financially-pinched Kentuckians cheered.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “The Nixon Era,” *The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine*, January 7, 1973, 12; and George C. Herring, “America and Vietnam: The Unending War,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 5 (Winter 1991): 104.

<sup>3</sup> “A New Search for Detente,” *The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine*, January 7, 1973, 18.

<sup>4</sup> “No Total Pullout until POWs Freed, President Says,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 3, 1972, A-1; *The Kentuckian* (Montgomery, AL: Paragon Press, 1972), 256, <https://exploreak.uky.edu/catalog/xt76q52f8201>; and “Readers’ Views,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 21, 1972, A-16.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 32; “New Terrorism, Old Causes” and “A New Search for Detente,” *The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine*, January 7, 1973, 24.

<sup>6</sup> “The Nixon Era,” *The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine*, January 7, 1973, 10; “1972 Nixon vs. McGovern,” *The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials, 1952-2020*, accessed February 19, 2022, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1972/>; and Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 38.



Richard Nixon, pictured above with his wife Pat, visited China in February 1972. He followed up that visit to China with a visit to Moscow in May.

As James Carville later famously stated, “It’s the economy, stupid.” Americans in 1972 were living with economic uncertainty, although rising fuel prices were not a concern yet as they would be several years later. The Industrial Revolution appeared to be happening in reverse; manufacturing jobs dried up, replaced with lower-paid service jobs. Some measures, such as rising stock prices and declining unemployment rates, seemed encouraging, but declining purchasing power told another story. Beef prices soared. Students lamented the rising cost of a college education, reporting in the University of Kentucky yearbook that they were now shelling out the outrageous sum of \$1,500 a year for tuition and room and board. McDonalds validated Americans’ pain, reassuring them “You deserve a break today,” a promise that resonated with two-income families, now short not only on cash, but also on free time.<sup>7</sup>

Not only were more American women working outside the home for the first time, they were doing other new things as well, and the nation reveled in these milestones. Shirley

Chisholm became the first woman and first African American to seek a major party’s nomination for president. The FBI hired its first female agents. Female runners long excluded from the Boston Marathon finally competed, and Billie Jean King became *Sports Illustrated’s* first female athlete of the year. Title IX of the Higher Education Act, passed in 1972, promising that women, currently only seven percent of high school athletes, would begin to play in equal numbers. After a half century of consideration, an Equal Rights Amendment finally passed and states including Kentucky dashed to ratify. But while equality seemed good in theory, it was hard to accept in practice. It took a lawsuit to make Eastern Kentucky University leaders eliminate a curfew that only applied to “co-ed” students. They still refused to allow campus health services to prescribe birth control.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of EKV administrators’ prudishness, Americans’ moral standards were loosening. The days of viewing sex as solely for procreation were over. The Supreme Court ruled in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* that single individuals had the right to access contraception just like married couples. The number of Americans choosing to “co-habitate” or “live together,” was on the rise. Americans were discussing sex more openly and displaying their bodies more exuberantly, men and women both. In May 1972, one female Derby goer noted that she had never seen so many naked men in her life as she did in the infield that year. Burt Reynolds posed naked in *Cosmopolitan* reviving a lackluster film career and Mark Spitz, the “mustachioed dentist” won seven swimming Olympic gold medals, got his face on a Wheaties box, and became the ultimate male sex symbol.<sup>9</sup>

One area of sexual identity remained off limits, however. The 1969 Stonewall uprising drew attention to gay rights but coming out of the closet did not get easier right away. A Louisville Gay Liberation Front organized in the early ’70s, and a homosexual couple sued to legally marry but the Kentucky Supreme Court dismissed the case. Students organized a Gay Alliance at UK during the 1971-1972 school year, but even when they managed to find an advisor, the university shut it down, declaring it a violation of the student code and state law.<sup>10</sup>

Marriage equality would have to wait, but other rights movements were making headway. The early 1970s introduced

<sup>7</sup> “The Control of Money,” *The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine*, January 7, 1973, 32; “The Nixon Era,” 12; and *The Kentuckian*, 169.

<sup>8</sup> Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 289; Nancy E. Baker, “Integrating Women into Modern Kentucky History: The Equal Rights Amendment Debate (1972–1978) as a Case Study,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 113, no. 2 & 3 (special issue, Spring/Summer 2015): 477-507; and “EKU Coed Curfews Liberalized; Suit Already Is Pending,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 20, 1972, B-1. Kentucky ratified the ERA in June 1972. Six years later, it rescinded its ratification.

<sup>9</sup> *Courier-Journal*, May 7, 1972, quoted in James C. Nicholson, *The Kentucky Derby: How the Run for the Roses Became America’s Premier Sporting Event* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 152; and “Flesh and Fantasy,” *The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine*, January 7, 1973, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Fosl, “It Could Be Dangerous! Gay Liberation and Gay Marriage in Louisville, 1970,” *Ohio Valley History* 12, no. 1 (spring 2012), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/571585/pdf>; and *The Kentuckian*, 253.

a push for Native American rights, “Brown Power” (the Chicano movement), and Asian American activism, all inspired by the Black Freedom struggle and its continuing fight against systemic racism. Though discriminating openly was no longer tolerated, the nation continued to celebrate a history built on white supremacy, as evidenced by the completion of the “Mount Rushmore of the Confederacy” at Georgia’s Stone Mountain in 1972. Desegregation began in the 1950s, but the color line remained clearly drawn, and critics noticed the nation was regressing. A jarring report issued by the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights announced that the Louisville school system, after showing significant progress, was retreating to segregation, and Fayette County Schools faced a similar lawsuit. The courts endorsed busing as the best solution, but few Americans seemed to agree.<sup>11</sup>

Kentuckians, divided politically, found light-hearted ways to make a point. Pandemonium erupted in March when Republicans, upset about HB 236, an industrial finance bill, released a live turkey on the floor of the General Assembly. Politics might divide, but athletics usually united Kentuckians. In 1972, they welcomed new coaches to lead the Wildcats. The “Baron of Basketball,” Adolph Rupp, finished his 42nd season and subject to the state’s mandatory retirement policy, he reluctantly turned things over to Joe B. Hall. Fran Curci took over late in the year as football coach.<sup>12</sup>

The state was entering a new era, a reality demonstrated in its relationship to King Coal. If Wendell Berry’s warning that “industrial vandalism” was leaving his state a “domestic Vietnam” was not enough to mobilize citizens, a coal slurry impoundment dam breach at Buffalo Creek, which killed 118 residents in Logan County, West Virginia, put people on notice. Legislators considered a number of bills during the 1972 session to hold the industry accountable. Measures to ban or significantly limit strip mining did not pass even after 20 women sat down in front of a bulldozer at Clear Creek in Knott County. Neither did legislation that would have increased operators’ share of black lung benefit costs gain traction. But a coal severance tax was added. The winds were changing, not just in Kentucky but across the country as Americans became environmentally aware.<sup>13</sup>

Nineteen seventy-two has the distinction of being the longest year ever recorded since two leap seconds were added to the calendar, and it certainly was an eventful year. Hindsight allows us to see that the world, the nation, and our communities sat on the cusp of change, but we can also see how the ties that bind us as humans have remained remarkably consistent.

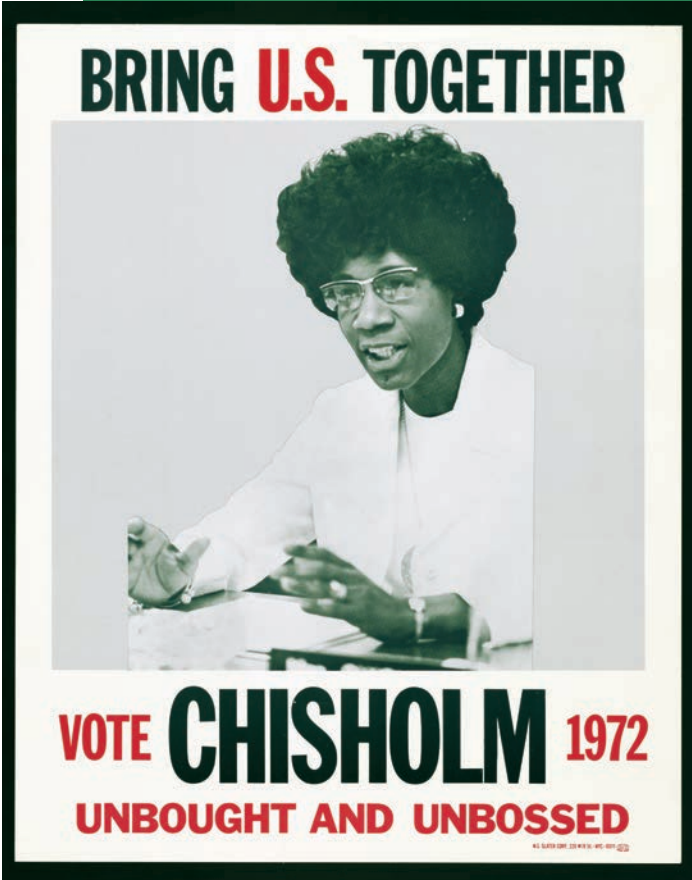


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

Shirley Chisholm was the first woman as well as the first African American to seek a major party’s nomination for President of the United States.

For 50 years, Kentucky Humanities has been *Telling Kentucky’s Story*, inspiring a deeper connection with the present, a richer understanding of the past, and a pioneering vision for the future. May the Kentucky Humanities sun continue to shine on us all and illuminate our way. Cheers to the next 50!

### About the Author

Dr. Melanie Beals Goan is a specialist in 20th century U.S. history, with specific interests in gender, Appalachia/Kentucky, and medical history. Her first book *Mary Breckinridge: The Frontier Nursing Service and Rural Health in Appalachia*, was published in 2008. Her second book, *A Simple Justice: Kentucky Women Fight for the Vote*, was published in November 2020. She is the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the University of Kentucky’s History Department.

<sup>11</sup>“Fayette School-Segregation Trial Starts,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 7, 1972, A-7; and “Louisville Schools Report Called Unfair by Officials,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 20, 1972, A-1, A-12.

<sup>12</sup>“Turkey Is Loosed in House Chambers,” *Paducah Sun-Democrat*, March 10, 1972, 2; *The Kentuckian*, 270; Mike Sullivan, “It’s Fran Curci: UK Gets Its New Football Coach,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, December 20, 1972, A-1.

<sup>13</sup>Wendell Berry, quoted in James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, *A New History of Kentucky*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 426-427; and “Coal: Severance Tax Was Its Only Setback,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, March 19, 1972, A-16.



NATIONAL  
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FOR THE  
HUMANITIES

# To Bring the Humanities to All Americans, NEH Needed Local Partners

*How the state humanities councils expanded and helped fulfill the mission of NEH*

This article is adapted from “To Bring the Humanities to All Americans, NEH Needed Local Partners” in the September/October 2015 issue of *Humanities* magazine, a publication of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

By Esther Farrington

“A laska, Wyoming, New York, California,” said Robert Vaughan, then-president and CEO of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. “There are tremendous variations. Every one of the 56 is unique.” By the 56, he meant not only the 50 state humanities councils, but also six parallel organizations in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and four territories—all of them set up, said Vaughan, “to serve where they are.”

After 43 years at the Virginia council, where he was at the start in 1974, Vaughan had an exceptionally well-informed perspective. Taking Virginia as a case in point, then, how is it unique? For Vaughan, there were two answers.

One is “the history of Virginia, beginning in 1607” with Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement. “There are lots of Virginians interested in the whole of Virginia history,” Vaughan says. The other was a wealth of “connections with the academic community in the state, which is large.” From the beginning, the Virginia council “developed with a very strong academic orientation,” he said. “It was founded at the University of Virginia, so we were already there. We were created there and have remained there.”

In 2015, that mix of factors shaped numerous fellowships and public programs supported by VFH, as well as continued work on the online Encyclopedia Virginia, the annual Virginia Festival of the Book, and two radio programs *BackStory*, hosted by three American historians (all endowed chairs, Vaughan noted), provides the

historical “back story” on national events; an hour-long program, it aired on 173 radio stations and its episodes had been downloaded more than 7.6 million times. A second radio program, *With Good Reason*, is an eclectic, wide-ranging interview program.

In contrast, consider Nevada, where a humanities council got started in 1971. In 1990, former chair Wilbur “Shep” Shepperson chronicled the council’s first years in *Sagebrush Urbanity*, a book published by the Nevada Humanities Council. In it, he describes a booming population that is also culturally divided between rural Nevada and the big cities of Las Vegas and Reno. “As the humanities committee was being formed,” Shepperson wrote, “there were 488,000” people in Nevada. “By 1980, the population exceeded 800,000, and in 1990 it reached 1,200,000,” with rising prosperity and an increasingly diverse population. “The committee serves and reflects a different people in 1990 than when it was formed in 1971,” he wrote. “Local conditions did not allow for a plateau mentality.”

The committee found itself not only balancing rural and urban needs, but also traditional and public humanities. “Man could speak eloquently through systematized scholarship,” Shepperson wrote of the Nevada council’s perspective, “but also by casually probing under the leaves of nostalgia or by observing contemporary life. The Romanesque shopping plaza and the smalltown boxcar museums are balanced against the academic and the traditional as honorable subjects for aesthetic and humanistic support and study.”

Twenty-five years after Shepperson’s book (to which a later

Nevada executive director has since written a sequel), Nevada Humanities offers—among other programs—Humanities on the Road, the Vegas Valley Book Festival, the Reno-based Nevada Humanities Literary Crawl, the Online Nevada Encyclopedia (called, naturally, the “ONE”), a distinguished writers program, the Nevada Humanities Festival and Chautauqua, Young Chautauqua, and more.

And all of that public humanities ferment is just in Virginia and Nevada, home of two of the 56 councils. Where did it all come from?

### An Extraordinary Innovation

“Everything about the state councils was novel, really novel,” in those early years, said Esther Mackintosh, former president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils. “It was totally new to create programs for the public involving the humanities—entirely new, particularly at the state level.”

The story behind that innovation began, like most good stories, with a dispute. The first and only term of the first NEH chair, Barnaby Keeney, drew to a close in July 1970. A former president of Brown University, Keeney chaired the original commission that led to the establishment of NEH. Like others, he saw it largely as a counterpart to the National Science Foundation, aimed at bolstering humanities scholarship at the national level. On this NEH quickly delivered, funding numerous fellowships and grants for premier humanities projects, from the papers of Booker T. Washington and George Washington to a multivolume biography of Thomas Jefferson, to archaeological expeditions that included an ancient Greek merchant ship. Through NEH funding, the BBC *Civilisation* television miniseries was distributed to 2,000 American campuses.

Meanwhile, the legislative father of NEH, Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, was stewing. Pell, who was first elected in 1960, saw NEH as a key legacy from his first term as senator. Now, in the latter part of his second term, he watched, with frustration, the runaway public success of the better-known National Endowment for the Arts. By their nature, the performing and visual arts inevitably look outward to public audiences, in a way that some core humanities tasks, such as research and writing, may not. Moreover, NEA provided local funding through state-level arts councils, tied into their respective state governments. NEH had no such state-level counterparts.

At a hearing in 1970 to reauthorize the law that established NEH, Senator Pell urged Keeney to consider such state councils for the humanities, an idea that Pell had long advocated. They would provide “more grassroots support,” said Pell, and would “help you help yourself here on the Hill.” In separate hearings on the Endowment’s budget request, Keeney noted that “we intend to take the urging of the authorizing committee very seriously”—by establishing experimental programs in “one or more states.” Such state programs “would have certain obvious

political advantages,” he conceded, “there are no really well-established state or regional institutions, and there is a lack of leadership. A good deal of the money would perhaps be used for programs of fairly low quality.” It was hardly a call to action.

### An Active Acting Chair

In August, following Keeney’s departure, a new acting chair entered the scene. Wallace Edgerton had been deputy chair of NEH. Equally important, he had been an administrative assistant to Senator Harrison Williams, whose Labor and Welfare Committee was home to Pell’s subcommittee. Williams left no doubt that Edgerton remained a well-known and well-liked figure there.

A World War II veteran who had fought in Europe in his early 20s as an infantry officer, Edgerton had a bachelor’s degree from Columbia in general studies. Before coming to Capitol Hill, he had worked for the March of Dimes during its national polio test. In *Sagebrush Urbanity*, Shepperson calls him “the ebullient Wallace Edgerton,” describing him as “an activist, an idea man, ‘who concocted ideas over a cup of coffee.’”

Edgerton set up trial programs in six states, trying out three different approaches. Two states relied on “arts and humanities councils” to distribute or “regrant” NEH funds, two used existing adult education programs, and two more had new committees created for the purpose, drawing members from “historical societies, libraries, educational institutions, and public television,” according to the NEH budget. The brand new committees, with no competing responsibilities, immediately proved the most successful.

For the fiscal year starting in July 1971, Edgerton won operational funding for those six states and another 10—all now following the volunteer committee model—as well as planning funds for 20 more. By the time he handed the reins over to NEH’s next chairman, the distinguished Shakespeare scholar Ronald Berman, in December 1971, a full 36 state humanities committees were on the way. Over the next few years, Berman continued on to the full complement of 50.

### The “Better-Known Literary, Business, and Judicial Lights”

The state humanities councils needed board members and staff. NEH consulted professional associations and reached out to local contacts in search of prominent citizens as well as academics and educational administrators in one state after another. In April 1971, Edgerton met in Washington with Robert Whittemore, dean of extension at the University of Nevada, Reno, and Laurance Hyde Jr. of the National Judicial College. Hyde and Whittemore were soon part of a committee of eight board members, with Judge Hyde as chair. That summer, Shepperson, chairman of the Nevada Historical Society, was tapped to fill a vacancy. Looking back in 1990, he recalled members who included “the state’s better-known literary, business, and judicial lights, including two college or university

presidents, a future governor, and leaders in Nevada’s senate and assembly.”

In such accounts of the early days, “I’m always struck by the sort of wonder that people on all sides had, that there, at the same table, were people from academia, business, and the cultural sector, all parts of the state’s communities, in a common enterprise that was new to all of them,” said Esther Mackintosh. “There was a lot of experimentation, in a certain way, because they were brand new. It was a sense of freedom that we’re inventing something here.”

For the volunteers themselves, in some states, the prospect came as a bit of surprise. The first step was usually an invitation to Washington. The five somewhat mystified invitees from Indiana weren’t quite sure what to expect. “They called us from Washington and asked us to come in to discuss this,” philanthropist Virginia Ball recalled for an oral history project years later. “We went in on a very hot, hot August” day, Ball said. “It was a new program. We weren’t sure just how it would work.”

For Robert Burns, a professor of history at Notre Dame University, “the idea of public discussion programs was something that I had absolutely never, never, never heard of. And no experience with it at all.” He said, “I mean this, this was off the wall. Well, I was into it, so I said ‘OK.’ And there was a date set when we were all supposed to go to Washington, which indeed we did. And the five of us met for the first time.”

Marvin Hartig, the dean of the evening college at the University of Evansville, remembered receiving a call in the summer of 1971. “She said, ‘I’m with the National Endowment for the Humanities.’ I hardly knew what that was at that point in time because the Endowment had just recently been established.” He told the caller about his adult education program and mentioned Bob Richey at Indiana University, head of the state’s largest continuing education program.

Eventually, there came another call: “Would you be willing to come to Washington for two days and meet with several other people from the state of Indiana along with us there at the Endowment?” He found himself in Washington with Bob Richey, Virginia Ball, Robert Burns, and Ed Howard, head of the Terre Haute Library.

“So,” said Hartig, “they told us the story and they left us alone for a little bit, you know, we talked amongst ourselves. And we decided we’re all gung-ho, we’re going to work on this.” A Hoosiers humanities council was born.

### Humanities, Themes, and Public Issues

For Indiana and Nevada, those first meetings were milestone events. For NEH, they may have been milestones—but they were also just two of what would be 50 similar stories, each involving leading figures within the states’ nascent humanities communities.

Setting up so many committees so quickly was an enormous challenge. John Barcroft, a former NEH staffer, had left to become a college provost in Florida. Now he came back to start the program.

By September 1972, Barcroft was visiting the committee in Nevada. Brilliant and intense, Barcroft found members for the state humanities committees and set out the rules for each to follow.

First, each committee had to come up with a single “theme” that would apply to all approved projects, to avoid a scattershot approach. Second, the purpose of the committees’ work was to elicit proposals, and regrant NEH funds, for humanities projects related to public policy—that is, to issues of concern to the public in that state. Public debate was fundamental to the basic conception of state humanities programming.

Still, it was a scheme that proved too narrow in many states. While Nevada’s first theme, “The Role of Law in Modern Society,” made sense for a committee chaired by a judge from a judicial college, it was also limiting. “Several proposals had the word ‘law’ rather artificially attached,” Shepperson recalled. “Dissembling became amusing at times,” he wrote, citing, for example, “The Role of Law and Flood Control in Las Vegas Valley.” It was not until 1975, with the bicentennial on the horizon, that the council broke free with a new, more flexible theme: “Continuity and Change.”

### Humanities, not the Humane Society

As they sought a way forward, the committees traveled within their states. In Indiana, “some of my friends thought it was the Humane Society, that it was about cats and dogs,” recalled Virginia Ball cheerfully. But she soon convinced them “it wasn’t that.” Instead, “we took a sort of a ‘dog-and-pony’ show around the state to different places where we had people come in and let us explain what the humanities were and ask for programs and for people.”

Much of the travel, of course, was left to Indiana’s first executive director, Martin Sullivan, who was hired as he was completing his doctorate at Notre Dame. “I spoke to a lot of Rotary Clubs and a lot of faculty meetings,” he recalled. “We all used to read de Toqueville, you know, to think about what is this, what is the American character: volunteerism and the rest. But that was pertinent to the state committees and councils.”

In the spring of 1974, Rob Vaughan was similarly just finishing his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia when “the university president called me in.” Virginia was the 44th state on NEH’s state committee list and Vaughan was offered a job for the January to May semester, he recalled, to work out “what we would do and how we would do it.”

Vaughan too found himself “spending a lot of time driving around the state” to Norfolk, Richmond, Wise, and other destinations. The fledgling committee held 10 public forums to seek input. “People turned out in droves,” he recalled, talking about the “kinds of issues they were interested in,” including a pressing issue of the time, physical accessibility. With the committee ready to start operations, the state’s annual humanities conference agreed to organize its fall 1974 event around the new committee’s efforts, helping immensely in spreading the word. Virginia’s humanities program was off and running.

By then, of course, the Nevada Humanities team had been in operation for a few years. A committee-funded television documentary on capital punishment won an award. Slideshows produced by a town's historical museum were borrowed by communities across the state, and several won awards as well. A panel called "Women, Sex, and Race" was well received; so too was a film series based on watching and discussing such classics as *The Oxbow Incident*, *High Noon*, and *Witness for the Prosecution* (all, of course, related to "the role of law").

Especially in states with large rural areas, the committees were drawn to television, radio, touring exhibitions, and even slideshows as tools that might reach statewide. Public participation, however, often came down to one approach. "We really only had one arrow in our quiver, you know, the public discussion," recalled Robert Burns of the Indiana committee. "What we discovered early on was that these things only work if you have some kind of common ground to work from," he explained. "That means either somebody has to give a talk, you have to read a book or an article, you have to look at a film, you have to look at a building."

Ed Howard, of the Terre Haute Library, encouraged any number of them. "All of us were charged to stir up a little something in our particular area," Burns recalled. "But the guy who I think was most successful in that was Ed Howard, because we made jokes that there were so many public discussion programs being held in and around Terre Haute that it was going to sink into the ground! Couldn't stand the weight."

Howard was, in fact, a strong believer in the entire public humanities approach. "If he mentioned it one time, he mentioned it a hundred times," said Hartig. "He compared this to the Chautauqua movement of our nation." Howard "just loved that tie-in. And he was so anxious for the libraries to be an avenue to involve more public discussion, not just a place to harbor a lot of books."

## A Final Collision

Change, however, was in the air. In 1975, an assistant to John Barcroft came to the first of the Nevada committee's annual retreats, urging the committee to lobby their congressional delegation to "save the state programs" from elimination or being turned over to the states, as the "Senator Pell Amendment" was said to do.

Just as the humanities committees were coming into their own, old Washington conflicts had returned. Senator Pell had once again taken on the issue of the state committees, arguing that the committees should become permanent councils, something close to state agencies. He also greatly delayed Chairman Berman's renomination hearing after President Ford put him forward for another term. By the day of the hearing, the *Washington Post* was profiling Berman like a prizefighter, describing his morning jog before what it called "an intellectual shoot-out over humanities."

By the time the dust had settled, the senator had prevailed in part. Berman did not serve a second term, and the committees became "councils." Governors were now entitled to appoint a

few members to the council boards. At the same time, the old requirement of specifying one "theme" and engaging in public policy issues was dropped, to most of the councils' great relief. It was also at about this time, in 1977, that the Federation of State Humanities Councils was formed.

## Public Humanities, a State at a Time

"We're still in the business of public humanities," said David Tebaldi, former executive director and CEO of Mass Humanities. "Both academic and public humanities are grounded in scholarship. That's a given." The challenge is to make them "relevant to the public, to ordinary people." The state councils, he said, have "an implicitly populist orientation. They're closer to the people and respond to the needs and interests of local communities."

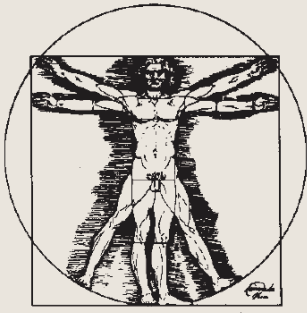
Tebaldi, who first worked for several years for the Wyoming Humanities Council, was executive director in Massachusetts from 1985 to 2018. His move from Wyoming, a state with almost no humanities resources at that time, to Massachusetts, filled with top-level universities and museums, was the most vivid possible illustration of each state's unique challenges. For the Massachusetts council, in fact, the original "public policy" approach has become the perfect niche.

Among its variety of programs, including courses and oral history projects, we "bring humanities to bear on issues of importance to the state," said Tebaldi. In a spirit that harks back to the state committees of the 1970s, Mass Humanities produced an annual fall symposium on "problems of democracy," said Tebaldi, though "not so much public policy. We began with the branches, starting with the presidency." Participants included "historians, journalists, public officials, and members of former administrations. We looked at how presidential reputations change over time; we could get at a historical perspective."

Other branches of government, and other topics—economic inequality, civil rights issues—followed, but always on a subject that's both "timely and of enduring significance," he said. "The humanist element is central, and that's what makes the difference." He added, "It's a different voice. When it works best, it brings a certain wisdom and a perspective."

"In recent years," said Esther Mackintosh, "other councils have revisited issues of public policy, too. Increasingly, councils have come back around to this notion of how humanities can help us address issues of contemporary concern," she said, "issues that people really care about, but on which they have difficulty finding common ground, providing a bridge between widely differing points of view, for which you need neutral ground."

One reason is that the "councils are seen as not imposing a point of view," she said. "They have the tools—humanities-led public discussion, examples from history, principles from philosophy, how people can live vicariously through pieces of fiction. It's not 'we can do what they did,' not that," Mackintosh said. "It's understanding the rich body of human experience."



# Join Our Experiment

By Dr. Virginia G. Carter

**K**entucky Humanities was conceived in early 1972 when the National Endowment for the Humanities invited Kentucky to join the growing number of states participating in its experimental program: federally funded, citizen governed state arts and humanities councils.

In 1965, led by Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell and supported by the Johnson administration, Congress passed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), though twins in legislation, were then and are now separate entities. A portion of federal funding appropriated by Congress would go to the states in very different ways. From the beginning, federal funding from NEA was directly granted to state governments, resulting in the establishment of state arts councils. These arts councils were funded in part by state dollars and governed as state agencies. But in 1972, when five Kentucky scholars were invited to Washington to learn about the opportunity to begin a humanities agency, they learned they would need to start a nonprofit organization governed by a volunteer board of directors. The nonprofit, named Kentucky Humanities Council, Inc., would apply for a federal grant for financial support. It would not be a state agency. To this day Kentucky Humanities has remained a nonprofit organization and a grantee of NEH. The humanities councils would also be required to match their federal funding with private dollars. It would be up to them to raise private funds.

Less than two months after returning to Kentucky from Washington, D.C., these Kentuckians had established the Kentucky Humanities Council with a 15-member volunteer board of directors and, importantly, had gained the support of the University of Kentucky. The University of Kentucky

provided a campus office in the old Engineering Quadrangle, a telephone, and a typewriter. Also, because NEH focused heavily on scholars, the backing of the state's flagship university was met with great approval from NEH. Since 1972, UK has furnished Kentucky Humanities with offices for an ever-growing number of programs, establishing a partnership unique among state humanities councils.

Kentucky Humanities was charged by NEH with supporting humanities projects at the local level.

Everyone agreed on what the arts were. But, what, exactly, were the humanities? And how would this new organization reach the attention of nonprofit organizations that would be eligible for funding? In its very first brochure, Kentucky Humanities asked the public, but mostly academic scholars, "Let us know your ideas for a state theme." That first brochure was written on a typewriter and mimeographed.

Following NEH guidelines would also be a challenge for a fledgling humanities council. NEH envisioned state councils as mini-NEHs, distributing funds to educational and community organizations through grants. NEH's support and funding had restrictions and requirements: a "theme" for the year, participation by scholars in the humanities, programs restricted to out-of-school adults, development of grant guidelines, a logo, and until 1976, projects that focused on public policy issues.

Since the public had not yet been widely introduced to the new humanities council, the pressure was on to find grant applicants fitting the criteria and willing to submit the paperwork. In the council's second newsletter, the headline read "\$75,000 to Give Away." In 1977 a \$50,000 grant to Kentucky Educational Television (KET) for a TV history of Kentucky was the largest grant that had ever been awarded by the council at that time.

Above: In the early years, Kentucky Humanities went through several logos. The sun-face that is used today first appeared in 1991.



## "The principal function of the Kentucky Humanities Council is to grant money."

By 1976, the grant business had picked up a great deal in both quantity and quality. NEH had discontinued the restriction of focusing on public policy issues. An assistant director was added to the staff to help process the grants. It was becoming very crowded in the small office in Breckinridge Hall. In 1977, thanks to former UK president Otis A. Singletary, Kentucky Humanities' offices were moved to the second floor of the university's Ligon House on Limestone Street. President Singletary, who later became a board member, always stressed the value of life-long learning in the humanities. He was also responsible for the next location of council offices, a whole house on Clifton Avenue where the council resided from 1986-1993. We continue to be grateful to the University of Kentucky for housing us since the beginning and for our current home on Maxwell Street.

With the move to Ligon House came a new logo, the first to reference a sun-face and the illuminating light of the humanities. A second sun-face would be added in 1980, followed by the current image.

Given more space, more staff, and increased funding from the NEH, the director and the board wanted to expand beyond awarding grants to directly reaching communities through services. In 1978, Kentucky Humanities began the precursor to a Speakers Bureau: the first two "traveling humanities professors" hit the road. For eight months these professors went from county to county, giving talks on literature, history, and current issues, all the while serving as humanities ambassadors, encouraging people to develop their own humanities projects.

In 1986, the council launched the first program designed as a state-wide service—the Speakers Bureau. Based on the idea that the rich resources of our colleges and universities would be interesting to the public, Kentucky Humanities began bringing the expertise of humanities scholars to communities large and small by way of their libraries, historical societies, civic clubs, church groups, homemakers, and just about anywhere people could gather. The Speakers Bureau was so successful that the council sometimes ran out of money before the year ended.

As long as the council's existence depended on federal funding, grants would remain a priority. However, if Kentucky Humanities were ever to expand beyond functioning as a mini-NEH, there would need to be private fundraising. As of March 31, 1980, the council had \$11,271 in a savings account. Few people would donate money to be given away to projects they knew nothing about. And because Kentucky Humanities so strongly focused on grants in the early years, public perceptions persisted that the council's primary function was to give away money. Only new non-grant programs would explain the need for private contributions. The Speakers Bureau was just the start of a whole new outlook. But at its beginning, the Speakers Bureau also was paid for by federal dollars.



In the beginning finding grant applicants was difficult. The second newsletter, distributed in 1974, touted "\$75,000 to Give Away!"

The first 20 years were a gradual evolution from "experiment" to establishment. Kentucky Humanities became known as a resource for community organizations to support programs meaningful to and designed by people throughout the Commonwealth. Audiences making use of the Speakers Bureau provided their suggestions for new topics while reviewing programs they had hosted. New Books for New Readers, a series of books for adult literacy students, were authored in consultation with adults learning to read. Grant programs were evaluated by the audiences they generated.

The growing popularity of services yielded new challenges for leadership. Kentucky Humanities began to evaluate the effectiveness of grants of more than \$5,000 as the principal means of reaching all 120 Kentucky counties. Would more, smaller "mini" grants of \$1,500 effectively serve small community organizations? Would expanding program services make the humanities accessible to Kentuckians throughout the Commonwealth? And while Kentucky Humanities would continue to pay for grants with federal funding, how would it support expanding program services already in great demand?

Federal funding fluctuated through presidential administrations. In 1981, President Reagan proposed 50 percent cuts in funding for both NEH and NEA. Could Kentucky Humanities survive the real and perceived threat of the loss of federal dollars? What would become of Kentucky Humanities without federal support?

Would we fold our tent and vote ourselves out of existence? Or, did we owe it to the people of Kentucky to find a way? Decidedly yes. The board of directors concluded that through fundraising, partnerships, and public support Kentucky Humanities would not only survive but thrive for another 40 years.

### Find a Way

Kentucky's bicentennial of statehood in 1992 was an opportunity to focus on the future and a new era of programs. With a grant from the Kentucky Bicentennial Commission, Kentucky Humanities launched Kentucky Chautauqua®, a series of one-person historical

## Kentucky Chautauqua Drama



Professor Carol Crowe-Carraco was in the original Kentucky Chautauqua lineup in 1992, portraying Mary Breckinridge.

Kentucky Chautauquans apply to be part of the program, first submitting a written overview of the person they want to represent and giving reasons why that individual's story needs to be told. Auditions follow and are reviewed by board members as well as historians and drama specialists. Candidates come from all walks of life, with or without professional training in theatre.

One ultimately successful applicant reported that she cried all the way home, believing she had no chance. A history professor, she had driven to the audition in Lexington all the way from Bowling Green with her two young children, one of whom had just accidentally smacked his sister in the teeth with a golf club.

dramas that toured all 120 Kentucky counties from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The 265 programs that summer were both accurate history and good drama, obtaining a dedicated following. Because of popular demand, what was intended as a one-year program continues to this day. Kentucky Chautauqua has brought to life more than 80 famous and unknown figures from Kentucky's past and has reached more than half-a-million Kentuckians. Combined with the Speakers Bureau, these easily accessed programs quickly eclipsed the outreach of grant-funded projects. Almost as quickly, these programs gained sponsorship from institutions of higher education, corporations, banks, and local sponsors.

Previously, NEH guidelines also specified that federal funds were for out-of-school adult audiences. Teachers qualified, students did not. Teachers, but not school children, had always been a priority audience for Kentucky Humanities, but reaching teachers was not as easy as it would seem. From 1984-1988, the council sponsored two two-week professional development seminars for public and private school teachers. These programs were worthwhile, but they were expensive to conduct and reached only a handful of teachers. Kentucky Humanities would not give up on our teachers, but would find a better way to serve them, eventually. When NEH guidelines no longer restricted programs to teachers, Kentucky Humanities could reach schools directly. Kentucky Humanities' board felt strongly that Kentucky Chautauqua would be a valuable teaching tool for K-12 classrooms. Teachers agreed. With private funding through grants and donations, in 2005 Kentucky Chautauqua went to school. By 2007, the Speakers Bureau and Kentucky Chautauqua had reached more than 84,000 Kentucky community members and school children.

As was hoped, the value of Kentucky Humanities' programs has been recognized by institutions of higher education. Not only have faculty participated as speakers, grant advisors, and Kentucky Chautauqua consultants, but Kentucky Humanities has received financial support from both independent and public colleges and universities.

Kentucky Humanities, though not a state agency, is a proud member of the Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet and has formed long-standing partnerships with many state agencies.

The Kentucky Arts Council chooses the state's Poet Laureate and Kentucky Humanities often tours the poets laureate through the Speakers Bureau.

The Kentucky Heritage Council has been both recipient and sponsor of unique exhibits about Kentucky archaeology, at times co-sponsoring publications, films, and exhibits about Kentucky's native people, Kentucky's Civil War trails, and the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as well as interpretation of historic architecture.

The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, through its network of libraries in all Kentucky counties, has hosted book discussions, Kentucky Chautauqua presentations, and has been a partner in the award-winning program, Prime Time Family Reading®.

KET is perhaps the longest serving partner. KET received one of Kentucky Humanities' first grants in 1977 and since then has routinely aired films produced with Kentucky Humanities' support.

The Kentucky Folklife Program, hosted by Western Kentucky University since 2012, began with a federal grant to Kentucky Humanities that provided the foundation for an inter-agency state partnership between the Kentucky Historical Society and the Kentucky Arts Council.

In 2004, Kentucky Humanities partnered with the Smithsonian Institution's Museums on Main Street to rent and provide a series of traveling exhibits and associated programs to small or rural Kentucky museums. Without the Kentucky Department of Transportation to deliver these exhibits to host sites throughout the Commonwealth, this opportunity to collaborate with the Smithsonian Institution would have been lost.

The University Press of Kentucky, which published New Books for New Readers, continued their support through 14 books in the series and has been a valuable supporter of the Kentucky Book Festival.

Kentucky State Parks has hosted Kentucky Chautauqua programs for decades and their resort parks also place *Kentucky Humanities* magazine in their guest rooms.

Grants from other federal agencies have also made a difference. A significant grant awarded in 1993 from the National Science Foundation, for example, supported *Science in our Lives*, three public lectures by nationally known speakers on how science and the humanities intersect.

When Kentucky Humanities celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights by bringing our first Kentucky Chautauqua presenters to the Kentucky State Fair in 1992, Kentucky Humanities received a truckload of copies of the Constitution of the United States and other educational materials from the Pentagon.

Kentucky Humanities also partnered with national organizations such as the American Association for State and Local History, the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commission, the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, the Library of Congress, and more.

The steady expansion of Kentucky Humanities' programs almost always focused on Kentucky. While other state humanities

councils tended to gravitate toward U.S. history, classical literature, etc., Kentuckians realized that we needed to build pride in the Commonwealth, our history, our writers, our culture. And the way we would do that would be to tell Kentucky's stories.

The second 20 years of our history, Kentucky Humanities would be known for *Telling Kentucky's Story*, including a 200-year celebration important to both Kentucky and to the nation.

One of Kentucky's greatest stories is Abraham Lincoln. To acknowledge that Lincoln was a Kentuckian, Kentucky Humanities dared to bring Lincoln to the nation's capital in February 2009, the bicentennial of his birth. Kentucky Humanities celebrated our 16th president at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In the worst ice storm to hit Kentucky in many years. In the devastating recession. Thanks to Kentuckians who believed in our quest, more than 450 vocalists, actors, musicians, dancers, and speakers arrived in Washington, D.C., on February 2, 2009, and after only one on-site rehearsal, received a standing and thundering ovation. *Our Lincoln: Kentucky's Gift to the Nation* was a perfect example of partnership and friendship. What other opportunities were waiting for Kentucky Humanities?

Who are Kentucky Humanities? Who made the decisions and brought the humanities so far and dared to produce *Our Lincoln*? Kentucky Humanities is not just governed by a 23-member board of directors, it is a voluntary board that does the work that makes everything possible. Elected for six-year terms and giving of their time and resources, board members come from every part of the state to represent and host programs in their regions and their hometowns and institutions. They raise the funds to support the programs that they decide reflect the educational needs of Kentuckians, then they personally evaluate the results. On occasion they have adventures in the process. At one meeting in Livingston County, a board member attending a cultural festival funded by Kentucky Humanities noted a demonstration of border collies. She saw puppies for sale, bought one, and immediately departed for home in Somerset. Board colleagues were updated on what followed—she bought sheep, learned to spin and dye wool, and created artistic woolen clothing.

## Adventures in Board Meetings

Kentucky State Parks have been the ideal locations for meetings of Kentucky Humanities' Board of Directors. These 18 resort parks are located across the Commonwealth and offer the opportunity for directors to visit parts of the state with which they might not be familiar. While conducting Kentucky Humanities business, they also can visit local museums, historical societies, and attend Kentucky Humanities-funded cultural events. In a retreat atmosphere, directors can get to know each other and often form lifelong friendships. They, as well as Kentucky Humanities staff, can also find adventure. At a meeting at Buckhorn State Resort Park in the most remote part of Perry County, the Park Ranger came in to announce that persistent heavy rains had flooded the bridge into and out of the park. Board members were comfortable with lodging and plenty of food available, but Associate Director Kathleen Pool was not comfortable. She was due to have her second child. Fortunately, after a day's delay, her husband was able to cross the flooded concrete bridge with his Jeep, no helicopter needed.

## And Since Then— Opportunities and Unimagined Challenges

A change in leadership in 2014 led to the expansion of existing programs and forging new ones. Kentucky Chautauqua added more presenters and the Speakers Bureau offered new speakers, Museum on Main Street exhibits toured even more Kentucky communities, and there have now been 308 six-week Prime Time Family Reading programs reaching 4,460 families, many of whom previously had no books in their homes. In 2016, Kentucky Humanities also took on a huge responsibility by hosting and managing the Kentucky Book Fair. Soon enough, by 2018, the two-day book fair was increased to the week-long Kentucky Book Festival. In addition to hosting authors from Kentucky and beyond, there are now special author events throughout the week, school programs, and presentations. Kentucky Humanities has also become the hosting organization for the National Center for the Book. Kentucky Reads is new a state-wide book discussion taking place at libraries, book clubs, and community organizations throughout the Commonwealth each year. And *Kentucky Humanities* magazine is available everywhere.

Many of Kentucky Humanities' programs in the past five years have focused on reading as a basic endeavor for sharing and understanding our common heritage and our ability to talk about issues and ideas that matter to us all. What began as a focus on improving literacy in the Commonwealth has become a way for citizens to discuss and share their views on issues, to learn from each other, to build a stronger sense of community. Kentucky's children are becoming life-long readers in families strengthened by books in their homes.

Kentucky Humanities has not abandoned its dedication to Kentucky's history and heritage. *Kentucky Humanities* magazine, originated in 1994, provides insights into Kentucky's past with articles contributed by authors on events and people through time and place and introduces Kentuckians to stories and places far from their home communities. More than 32,000 magazines are distributed each year in addition to each issue being available at [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org).

Among the newest programs, *Think History* is becoming one of the most far-reaching programs yet. Each weekday a new episode is broadcast twice on 88.9 WEKU-FM, narrated by Bill Goodman, the current executive director. In 2021, this increasingly popular program began being broadcast in western Kentucky on 91.3 WKMS-FM, giving listeners across the Commonwealth the opportunity to enjoy brief, but enticing bits of Kentucky's history.

### 2020 Pause for COVID-19

The pandemic brought changes and challenges for all Kentuckians, not the least Kentucky Humanities. In-person programs became online programs. Staff worked from home while board and committee meetings were held online. Still, two rounds of funding from Congress—the CARES Act and the American

## Life in Pictures



One day, a middle-aged man led his elderly mother up the steps of Kentucky Humanities' Maxwell Street office. She had seen an article in *Kentucky Humanities* magazine about the photographs by architectural historian Clay Lancaster. In that article was a photo of a farm home built in 1850 in Jessamine County. The image featured a small girl standing on the porch. Our visitor wanted us to know that she was that child.

Rescue Plan—allowed Kentucky Humanities to deliver more than \$1.3 million in grants to Kentucky cultural organizations. Face-to-face interaction, the bedrock of Kentucky Humanities programs, was put on hold for a time, but Kentucky Humanities is ready and planning for the return of in-person events.

### Into the Future

For an organization that began with a one-room office and a mimeograph machine to currently occupying a stately Victorian office home on Maxwell Street and hosting a fully integrated website, in 50 years Kentucky Humanities has come far and accomplished much. But be assured, dear reader, that the next 50 years will bring more humanities in more ways to Kentuckians wherever they live, and will provide opportunities to come together as Kentuckians, as communities, and as citizens. We are not finished *Telling Kentucky's Story* and we are not finished listening to yours.

### About the Author

Virginia G. Carter was the executive director of Kentucky Humanities from 1989-2014 having served previously as assistant director for two years. She holds a Ph.D. in anthropology (University of Kentucky), master of arts degrees in art history and anthropology (University of Kentucky), and a bachelor of arts degree in art (Louisiana State University). In 2008 and 2009, she organized, authored, and produced *Our Lincoln: Kentucky's Gift to the Nation*.



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# Highlights from Our History

1972

## Getting Started

In February 1972, five Kentuckians visited Washington for a briefing on a new National Endowment for the Humanities program. Congress had instructed NEH to set up state-based affiliates to support humanities projects at the local level.

Within two months they had established the Kentucky Humanities Council with a 15-member board of directors and a two-person staff housed in offices donated by the University of Kentucky.



The Kentucky Humanities Council's two-person staff was originally housed at Breckinridge Hall on the campus of the University of Kentucky.

## First Grants Awarded

The new council applied to NEH for project funds and was awarded \$200,000 in April 1973. Kentucky Humanities was legally allowed to use its new funds to award grants only to projects that examined public policy issues.

The first grant was awarded to the Citizens Metropolitan Planning Council of Louisville for "Community through Environment," a series of workshops on the relationship between public policy and neighborhood environment.

1973

1974

## \$75,000 to Give Away

Board Chair Jim Wayne Miller wrote in the second Kentucky Humanities Council newsletter that the council had "\$75,000 To Give Away!" Indeed, in the early years when the Kentucky Humanities Council was known to few, we sometimes had to hustle to get rid of all the grant funds.



Arthur Curtis served as the executive director of the Kentucky Humanities Council from 1972-1978.

# 1970S

1976

## **The Rules Change**

The Kentucky Humanities Council's grant business picked up considerably, in both quantity and quality, after Congress widened the playing field in 1976 by dropping the requirement that all state humanities council projects focus on public policy issues. The Kentucky Humanities Council expanded its guidelines to include projects addressing "community concerns," such as family life, local traditions, and the changing roles of women.

1977

## **The Largest Grant To-Date**

Nowadays, we don't often get close to this whopper—\$50,000 awarded to Kentucky Educational Television (KET) for "This Other Eden," a television history of Kentucky.

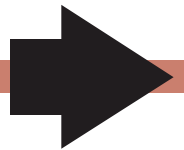


*In 1977, the Kentucky Humanities Council moved to a new office on the University of Kentucky campus, the Ligon House.*

## **Roads Scholars**

In September 1978, the Kentucky Humanities Council's first two Traveling Humanities Professors hit the road. For eight months they went from county to county, giving talks on literature, history, and current issues, all the while encouraging people to develop their own humanities projects. The traveling professor program continued for four years.

1978



# 1980s



1980

## "If We're Not Careful..."

With the help of a Kentucky Humanities Council grant, Centre College coordinated a statewide tour of the one-man show "Einstein, the Man." It traveled to 19 Kentucky communities. After one program, an audience member was heard to say, "If we're not careful, we'll learn something." You bet.



Ralph Janis, Ramona Lumpkin, and Charles Cree served as executive directors in the '80s.



## Seminars for Teachers Begin

Summer Seminars for Teachers were the Kentucky Humanities Council's most ambitious foray into professional development for teachers. From 1984–1988, the Kentucky Humanities Council sponsored two two-week humanities seminars per summer for public and private school teachers. Topics ranged from Dante's *Divine Comedy* to post-Civil War Kentucky.

1984



## The Speakers Bureau

Launching the Speakers Bureau was the Kentucky Humanities Council's next step away from being solely a grant-making agency. Since 1986, more than 5,500 Speakers Bureau presentations have drawn an audience greater than 235,000.

1986



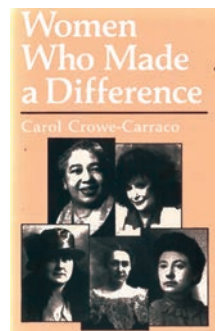
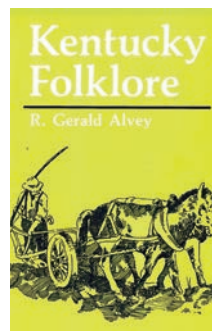
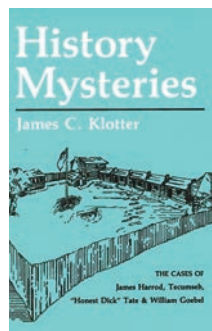
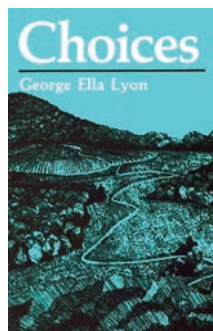
The Kentucky Humanities Council office moved again in 1987. Still on the University of Kentucky campus, Clifton Avenue was the new home of the KHC.



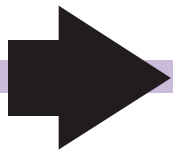
## New Books for New Readers

1989

New Books for New Readers is a series of books written at the 4th grade reading level for adult literacy students. The 64-page books were written by scholars with the help of literacy students and their tutors, and cover topics in Kentucky history, literature, and folklore. New Books for New Readers began with five titles, there are now 14 books in the series. New Books for New Readers have helped thousands of Kentuckians improve their lives by learning to read.



New Books for New Readers began with the release of these five titles. Since that time, nine additional New Books for New Readers have been developed.



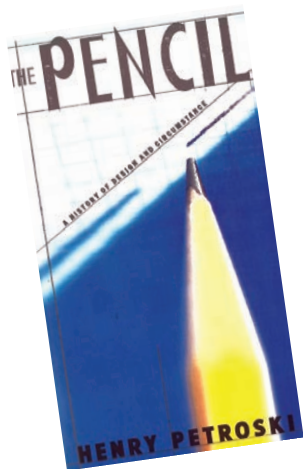
1992

### Kentucky Chautauqua®

As the Kentucky Humanities Council's contribution to the Commonwealth's bicentennial celebration, we created Kentucky Chautauqua. This wildly popular program has now brought more than 80 fascinating figures from Kentucky's past back to life through historically accurate impersonations and has been enjoyed by more than 650,000 Kentuckians. The original cast included Mary Carson Breckinridge, Belle Breezing, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Rev. Elijah Craig, Emmit Davenport, Joseph Galloway, Rev. Elisha W. Green, Gov. Edwin Porch Morrow, Cora Wilson Stewart, and Jesse Stuart.



Created to celebrate Kentucky's bicentennial, the original Kentucky Chautauqua cast (pictured above) traveled to all 120 Kentucky counties.



### Science in Our Lives

In recognition of science's growing importance in our lives, the Kentucky Humanities Council obtained funding from the National Science Foundation to bring in three nationally renowned speakers who offered unique perspectives on issues ranging from science education to landfills. They spoke live in Louisville, Lexington, and northern Kentucky, and their talks went statewide through *Kentucky Humanities* magazine and KET.

1993

# 1990s

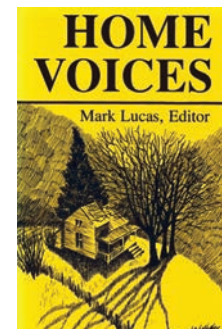
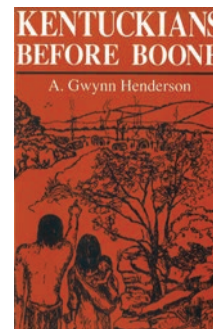
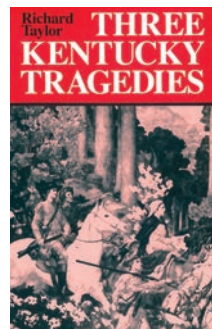
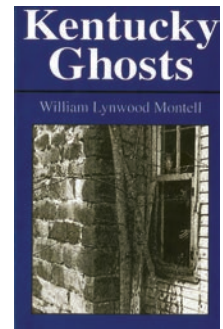
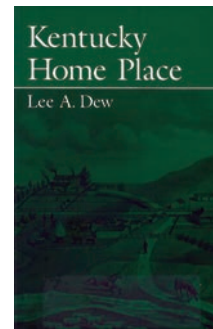
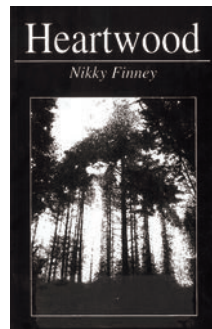
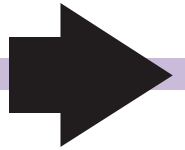


In 1995, the Kentucky Humanities Council once again found a new home on UK's campus. We are thrilled to call 206 East Maxwell Street home.

## 1994

### To the Mailboxes

To make the Kentucky Humanities Council's programs more accessible to those who can't attend them in person, we created a program that fits right in your mailbox. Twice a year, we distribute free copies of *Kentucky Humanities* magazine to a statewide audience. *Kentucky Humanities* can now be found in all state park guest rooms as well as doctors' and dentists' offices throughout the state.



After debuting in 1989, more New Books for New Readers were released in the 1990s.

# 2000s



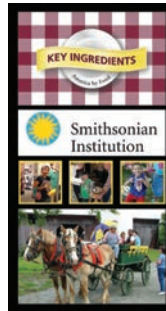
## Prime Time Family Reading®

Because reading is the most powerful intellectual skill a child can master, we first tried out this program in eight libraries to determine if it could turn at-risk students between the ages of 6 and 10 into committed readers. But the program's goal was more than reading: if successful, it would bond families through discussing the humanities topics and ethical issues to be found in children's literature. Since 2004, the Kentucky Humanities Council has hosted 308 Prime Time programs in Kentucky.

# 2004



# Smithsonian

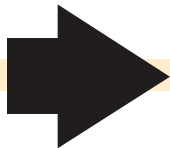


## The Smithsonian is Coming to Town

The Kentucky Humanities Council accepted an invitation from the Smithsonian Institution to arrange for traveling Museum on Main Street exhibits that would tour six rural Kentucky museums. Beginning with *Key Ingredients: America By Food*, the council has continued to sponsor these quality offerings to rural Kentucky communities. Seven Museum on Main Street exhibits have toured the Commonwealth, drawing more than 100,000 visitors.

The Smithsonian is coming to town and the Kentucky Humanities Council is bringing it there!

# 2004



2005

### Kentucky Chautauqua® Goes to School

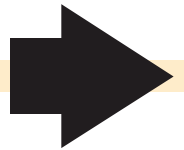
If Kentucky Chautauqua is an exciting way to learn about Kentucky's history and culture, why not take it to school? The impact has truly been dramatic. Kentucky elementary, middle, high school, and college students have learned from and loved these unique, story-based lessons from Kentucky's past. Since 2004, nearly 195,000 students have experienced Kentucky Chautauqua in their classrooms.



## 2008 & 2009

### Happy Birthday, President Lincoln

After trying out an ambitious musical, theatrical, historical Lincoln celebration at the University of Kentucky's Singletary Center for the Arts in February 2008, we knew we couldn't stop there. *Our Lincoln: Kentucky's Gift to the Nation* took the stage in February 2009, at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Kentucky's tribute to our 16th president was the only event of its kind in our nation's capital.

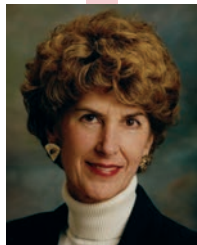




2011

### Words Do Matter

On April 7, 2011, we hosted Jim Leach, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, for a series of events as a part of his national Civility Tour. Mr. Leach's "Words Do Matter" public discussion focused on how America's democracy must be based in conversation that is civil and respectful of views that may contradict. The event highlighted how the humanities can help us reflect on and understand opposing perspectives and express differing viewpoints reasonably. Leach also met with the University of Kentucky's Gaines Center for the Humanities scholars and spoke with eighth grade and high school students, college freshmen, UK faculty, and civic leaders as part of a *Citizen Kentucky* forum on civic education.



After serving as the Kentucky Humanities Council's executive director since 1989, Virginia Carter retired in 2013. Ben Chandler became executive director in 2013 and served in that role until 2016.



2014

### Serving Veterans

The Kentucky Humanities Council participated in a reading and discussion program called "Talking Service" which used a compilation of readings, essays, and poetry entitled *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian*. The program was designed to bring 15-20 veterans together, of their own accord, to read passages from the book and have an open-ended discussion to get veterans talking about their military service. Critical to this effort was to conduct the reading and discussion program in a safe environment. The discussions were led by a trained scholar who is also a veteran of military service, and were held at four Kentucky sites: Bowling Green, Lexington, Fort Knox, and Fort Campbell/Hopkinsville.

### Adding the Kentucky Book Fair

In 2016, the Kentucky Humanities Council assumed management of the Kentucky Book Fair. Celebrating its 35th year, the Kentucky Book Fair is the Commonwealth's premiere literary event. The 6th Annual KBF Kids Day featured a master class with Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Maria Henson, attended by 300 high school students. Five hundred elementary and middle school students enjoyed presentations by children's authors throughout the day.

2016

# 2010s

## 2017

### A Year of Change

In 2017, Bill Goodman became the council's executive director.

The organization underwent a slight name change, becoming known as Kentucky Humanities.

New programs added included the launch of the *Think Humanities* podcast, a vlog series highlighting humanities programs, and our first community conversations, held for the public and for high school students, discussing race relations.

The Kentucky Book Fair moved from Frankfort to Lexington and Kentucky Humanities earned the designation as Kentucky's Center for the Book.



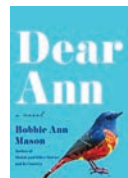
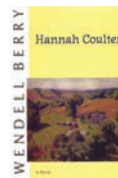
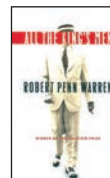
Bill Goodman became the executive director of the Kentucky Humanities Council in 2017.

## 2018

### Celebrating RPW

On April 24, 2018, in Guthrie, Kentucky, Kentucky Humanities launched Kentucky Reads: *All the King's Men*, a statewide read of Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize winning novel. The program included panel discussions, online book clubs, book discussions throughout the state and a lecture by presidential historian Jon Meacham. Since then, Kentucky Reads selections have included *Hannah Coulter* by Wendell Berry, *The Birds of Opulence* by Crystal Wilkinson, and *Dear Ann* by Bobbie Ann Mason.

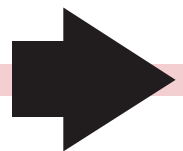
A grant from the NEH allowed the expansion of Prime Time into Kentucky elementary schools, and the Kentucky Book Fair evolved into the week-long Kentucky Book Festival.

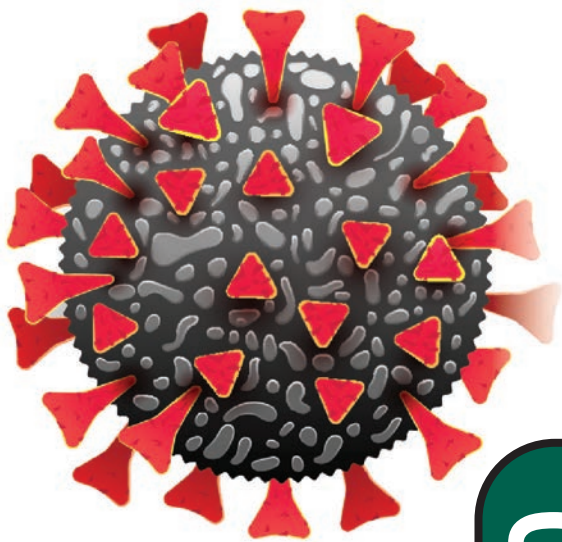


## 2019

### Taking to the Air Waves

*Think History* debuted in July 2019, on 88.9 WEKU-FM. Each weekday at 8:19 a.m. and 5:19 p.m. we take listeners on a trip back in time to relive a moment in Kentucky history. The 90-second segments cover everything from the Revolutionary War to burgoo, horseracing, basketball, and Kentucky's journey to statehood, while featuring the many colorful characters who have contributed to Kentucky's unique history and culture.





# 2020s

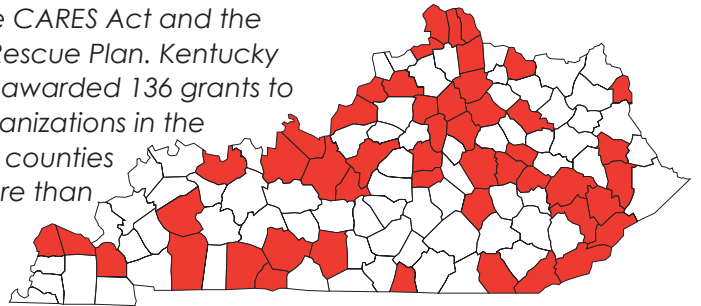
2020

## COVID-19 Causes Mayhem

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything for everyone. Like others throughout the world, Kentucky Humanities staff members began working from home, board and committee meetings were held online, and the first virtual Kentucky Book Festival occurred. With funding from Congress' CARES Act, Kentucky Humanities delivered \$500,000 in grants to 85 Kentucky cultural organizations.

**THINK HISTORY**  
From Kentucky Humanities

Through the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan, Kentucky Humanities awarded 136 grants to cultural organizations in the highlighted counties totaling more than \$1.3 million.



## Expanding Our Reach

Murray's WKMS-FM began airing *Think History*, giving more people across the Commonwealth a chance to travel back in time each weekday for a moment in Kentucky history.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued, and as a part of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act approved by the U.S. Congress, Kentucky Humanities awarded \$800,382 to 51 cultural organizations throughout the state.

2021

2022

## Celebrating a Half-Century

Kentucky Humanities celebrates 50 years of *Telling Kentucky's Story*. A year-long celebration is planned that includes public events across the state. Learn more about how to join the festivities at [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org)



KENTUCKY HUMANITIES



# The Birth of Kentucky's Long Literary Renaissance



By Dr. Morris A. Grubbs

**K**entucky is blessed with literary wealth, so much so that it proves difficult to overestimate the collective achievements in the last half century of the literary artists we call “Kentucky writers.” Whether they were born here or settled here, their words have fascinated us, shaken us, changed us. We are in their debt.

As readers, we yearn for writers who free us from the stranglehold of whatever may be confining us or holding us back. We want writers who give us joy and make us think, who challenge our perspectives and stretch our imaginations, who lead us to see ourselves and others in fresh new lights. Our Kentucky writers do all of this. Their achievements are what make literature essential to a democracy. Fostering meaningful engagement with literary works is among the reasons the National Endowment for the Humanities and our own Kentucky Humanities were formed.

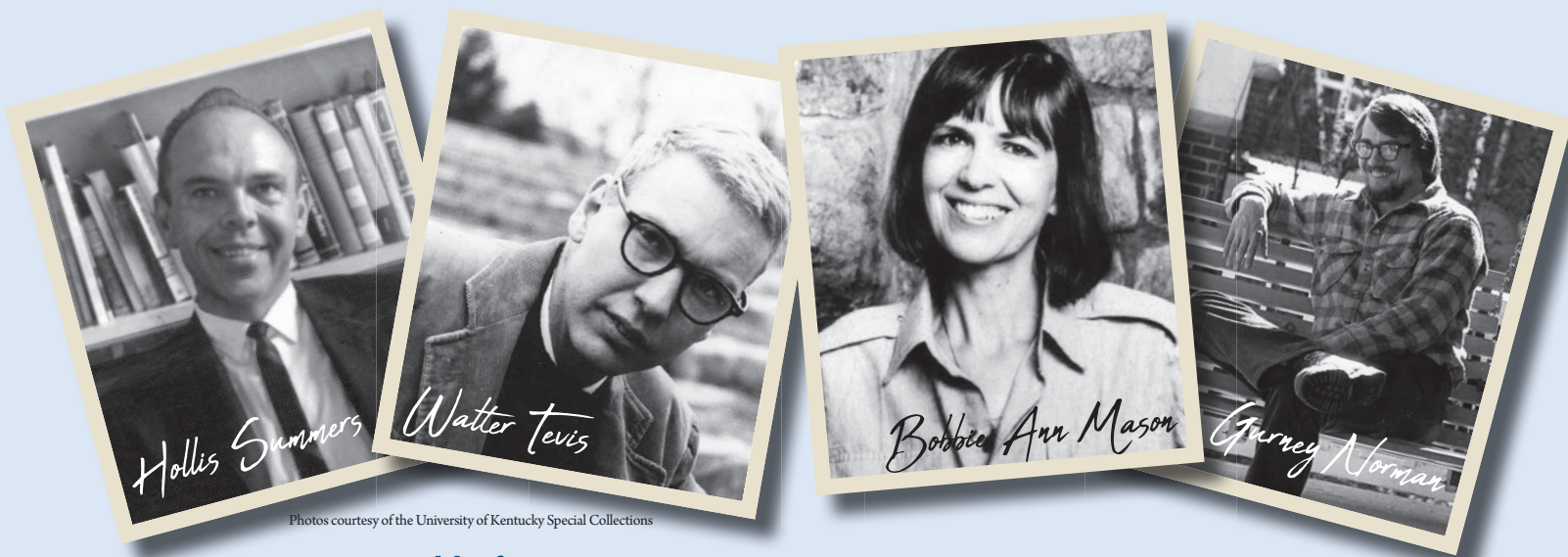
Why is the Commonwealth such a fertile ground for writers? This question has mystified readers near and far for decades. While there’s no single answer, the truth may lie in a composite of answers, or a choir of muses.

One muse is that Kentucky is a literal and figurative borderland. It’s a liminal space at the intersection of north and south, east

and west, agrarian and industrial, urban and rural. People in borderlands have strong cultural ties but can harbor internal tensions. This is fodder for good literature. These tensions can also ingrain a push-pull relationship to one’s place, sometimes leading to departures that are often balanced by returns. We see this pattern in the lives of many Kentucky writers.

Other muses include the geographical diversity of Kentucky’s regions, the natural beauty, the interconnectedness of land and people, and the paradoxes suffusing the landscapes. Running through modern Kentucky writing are veins of advocacy for people and nature and protests against the misuses and abuses of the land.

Of the myriad muses, some have more to do with serendipity than with affection for and defense of place. Chief among these is the crossing of paths with people who change and enrich lives. Ask any fiction writer or poet and you’ll find that much of who they are and what they write springs from formative encounters and enduring relationships. Very often these formative individuals are teachers and mentors, formal and informal, within and outside educational settings, who serve as catalysts of change and growth. It’s not a far stretch to say that the story of much of Kentucky’s modern literary renaissance is a story about the power of teachers.



Photos courtesy of the University of Kentucky Special Collections

## A Commonwealth of Inspiring Teachers and Mentors

Kentucky is rich with institutions that offer guidance to aspiring writers. Our public universities, community colleges, and independent liberal arts colleges are blessed with faculty who nurture creative imaginations and hone the difficult craft of writing. Teachers in primary and secondary schools throughout the state spark and kindle the writerly flame. The Carnegie Center in Lexington and The Hindman Writers Workshop in Knott County are two examples of community-centered institutions that make far-reaching impacts on writers throughout the Commonwealth.

In Kentucky's literary history, one team of teachers stands out for its profound role in the story of our modern literary renaissance. The stars aligned in the 1950s at the University of Kentucky when serendipity brought together what has become a legendary cast of creative writing students and teachers. Among the faculty at the time were novelist and short story writer Hollis Summers. He was later joined in 1955 by Robert Hazel, a renowned novelist and poet, and a galvanizing force to his students. Summers taught at UK for 10 years and Hazel for only six, but their influence on their students was profound and has reached across generations.

Preceding Hazel and overlapping a few years with Summers was novelist and long-time *Lexington Leader* journalist A. B. Guthrie, Jr., who won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1950. Guthrie taught at UK for only five years, but one of the students who came into both his and Summers' orbits was Walter Tevis, author of *The Hustler* and later *The Queen's Gambit*, *The Color of Money*, and many other novels. While Guthrie left UK in 1952 to devote full time to writing, Summers and Hazel and other UK English professors, especially Thomas Stroup, cultivated the aspiring young writers we have come to know as Kentucky's Literary Fab Five—Ed McClanahan, Gurney Norman, James Baker Hall, Wendell Berry, and Bobbie Ann Mason. Like so many Kentucky writers, these five would, in turn, become teachers and mentors to countless aspiring writers.

In a piece by John Kuehl in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring 1994) following Robert Hazel's death in 1993, Mason recalled that Hazel "talked in such a way that he made the process of

writing seem possible." Berry added, "Time after time, [Hazel] didn't hesitate to say that your writing wasn't good enough. He would go to great lengths to tell you why it wasn't good enough."

## Our Modern Literary Renaissance Begins

From the cultural fermentation of the 1960s and early 1970s arose both a spirited Kentucky Humanities and a heady new era of writing. Among the many seminal books published by Kentucky writers at the turn of the decade and in the opening years of the 1970s were Wendell Berry's *The Long-Legged House* (1969), *The Hidden Wound* (1970), and *The Unforeseen Wilderness* (1971); Gurney Norman's *Divine Right's Trip* (1972); Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972); and Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1975). These books and so many others of the time signaled exciting and diverse directions in our literature.

In Kentucky literary history, the 1970s was perhaps the first clear watershed decade. Some of the many other acclaimed books in the 1970s were Wendell Berry's *Farming: A Hand Book* (1970), *A Continuous Harmony* (1972), *The Country of Marriage* (1973), *The Memory of Old Jack* (1974), and *The Unsettling of America* (1977); Jim Wayne Miller's *Dialogue with a Dead Man* (1974); Gayl Jones's *Eva's Man* (1976) and *White Rat: Short Stories* (1977); Gurney Norman's *Kinfolks* (1977); James Still's *Pattern of a Man* (1976); and Richard Taylor's *Girty* (1977) and *Earth Bones* (1979). What a decade, but the same could be said about every decade since.

Poet and editor Jonathan Greene, in his preface to *Kentucky Renaissance: An Anthology of Contemporary Writing*, wrote in 1976

### Recent Appalachian and Affrilachian Anthologies in which Kentucky Writers Figure Prominently

***Appalachian Gateway: An Anthology of Contemporary Stories and Poetry***, edited by George Brose and Kate Egerton, with student editors Samantha Cole and Morgan Cottrell (2013)

***Black Bone: 25 Years of Affrilachian Poets***, edited by Bianca Lynne Spriggs and Jeremy Paden (2018)

***Writing Appalachia: An Anthology***, edited by Katherine Ledford and Theresa Lloyd (2020)

that “Kentucky, like any land, is both physical fact and a realm of the imagination, both geography and a state of mind.” He assembled “recent vintage” by 20 writers. While his anthology’s title declared the flourishing state of Kentucky’s literature, it also prophesied a literary renaissance that has now progressed for half a century.

In 1974, only two years after the creation of Kentucky Humanities, the young National Endowment for the Humanities chose Kentuckian Robert Penn Warren to give its third annual Jefferson Lecture, which Warren titled “Democracy and Poetry.” Warren held two Pulitzer Prizes, one for fiction for his great political novel *All the King’s Men* and a second for *Promises: Poems 1954-1956*. Later in the 1970s, Warren would earn a third Pulitzer Prize for *Now and Then: Poems 1976-1978*. He remains the only writer in American literature to win Pulitzer Prizes for both fiction and poetry.

Since the 1970s, two more writers from Kentucky have been selected to give the prestigious annual Jefferson Lecture, the highest honor conferred by the federal government for “distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities”: Cleanth Brooks in 1985 with “Literature and Technology,” and Wendell Berry in 2012 with “It All Turns on Affection.”

From the beginning, Kentucky Humanities has supported writers, scholars, teachers, and readers at all levels throughout the Commonwealth. It joins the many institutions, libraries, collectives, coalitions, and individuals who have worked to showcase Kentucky’s

literature. The Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame, established by the Lexington Carnegie Center in 2013, is one such effort that has heightened the awareness in the Bluegrass and beyond of the world-class achievements of our writers past and present.

Another steady source of support since the 1970s has been the efforts of many individuals to assemble literary collections and special issues of journals. Take a look below at a sampling of fiction and poetry anthologies, interview collections, and literary histories from the last 50 years. These have helped to make an even stronger case for the diversity, distinctiveness, and potency of our storied state.

## About the Author

Dr. Morris A. Grubbs has directed Graduate Student Professional Enhancement at the University of Kentucky since 2007 and has served as assistant dean of the Graduate School since 2010. Before transitioning to administration, he taught literature and writing for 10 years as a professor of English at Lindsey Wilson College. He holds a master’s in English from Western Kentucky University and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Kentucky. He has been a frequent presenter and panelist at the International Conference on the Short Story in English and is editor of *Home and Beyond: An Anthology of Kentucky Short Stories, Conversations with Wendell Berry*, and (with Mary Ellen Miller) *Every Leaf a Mirror*.

## Modern Kentucky Literary Anthologies, Histories, and Interview Collections (A Sampling from the 1970s to the present)

- Kentucky Renaissance: An Anthology of Contemporary Writers*, edited by Jonathan Greene (1976)
- A Literary History of Kentucky*, by William S. Ward (1988)
- Through the Gap: An Anthology of Contemporary Kentucky Poetry*, edited by Scot Brannon, Marguerite Floyd, Chris Green, and Marsha Hellard (1990)
- The Night Lifted Us*, Frankfort Arts Foundation (1991)
- The Dark Woods I Cross: An Anthology of Contemporary Louisville Women Poets*, edited by Kent Fielding, Ron Whitehead, and Jennifer Seelig (1992)
- A Gathering at the Forks: Fifteen Years of the Hindman Settlement School Appalachian Writers Workshop*, edited by George Ella Lyon (1993)
- 27 Kentucky Authors*, The Carnegie Center Press (1995)
- Kentucky Voices: A Collection of Contemporary Kentucky Short Stories*, edited by James Alan Riley (1997)
- In Memory’s Field: A Kentucky Sampler*, edited by Eric Trethewey (1998)
- Conversations with Kentucky Writers*, edited by L. Elisabeth Beattie (1996)
- Conversations with Kentucky Writers II*, edited by L. Elisabeth Beattie (2000)
- Writing Who We Are: Poems by Kentucky Feminists*, edited by Elizabeth Oakes and Jane Olmstead (2001)
- Home and Beyond: An Anthology of Kentucky Short Stories*, edited by Morris Allen Grubbs (2001)
- A Kentucky Christmas*, edited by George Ella Lyon (2003)
- Missing Mountains*, edited by Kristin Johannsen, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Mary Ann Taylor Hall (2005)
- The Kentucky Anthology: Two Hundred Years of Writing in the Bluegrass State*, edited by Wade Hall (2005)
- When the Bough Breaks* (an anthology by the members of the KaBooM Writing Collective, 2009)
- What Comes Down to Us: 25 Contemporary Kentucky Poets*, edited by Jeff Worley (2009)
- Kentucky’s Literary Landscape: The Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame* (2013-2017), edited by James B. Goode (2017)

# Kentucky Humanities By the #s

## 998

Kentucky Humanities has produced 998 episodes of *Think History* that air weekdays on 88.9 WEKU-FM and 91.3 WKMS-FM.



## 42



Kentucky Humanities has sponsored 10 tours of Museum on Main Street exhibits, traveling to 53 host sites in 42 counties reaching more than 77,000 people.

## 49

Since 1994, we have published 49 issues of *Kentucky Humanities* magazine. If you aren't receiving the magazine at your home, visit [kyhumanities.org](http://kyhumanities.org) to join the mailing list.



## 9,294

Since 2018, Kentucky Humanities has given 9,294 books to students across Kentucky through Kentucky Book Festival School Days. Authors visit classrooms to share their love of reading, writing, and illustrating with students. Each student receives a signed copy of the visiting author's book to add to their home collection.

## 7,538

Kentucky Chautauquan Jim Sayre traveled 7,538 miles to Saipan to portray Abraham Lincoln.

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*"Last night was our first Prime Time reading night. As part of the team, I almost thought it was hard to tell how it went, even though my teachers thought it was fantastic. I was able to watch our ESL families as our interpreter read the pages after me, though. Their faces lit up. I thought last night, if I never have another experience as an educator, that moment was worth every second spent on planning....until today. Today, I have had the same first grader ask me twice if I remembered last night. She's told her teacher about it all day long. Thank you for allowing us to give this opportunity to our kids. I can't wait for next week!"*

**— Erin E. Weaver, Fort Wright Elementary School**

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# 308

Since 2004, 308 Prime Time Family Reading® programs have been held in 87 Kentucky counties, reaching more than 54,600 participants.

# 919

From 1995-2018 George McGee gave 919 performances as Henry Clay. More than 121,000 people saw McGee's performances of Kentucky's Great Statesman.

# >5,500

Since its establishment in 1986, our Speakers Bureau members have delivered more than 5,500 presentations to community groups and classrooms throughout Commonwealth.



# >\$8.7 million

Kentucky Humanities has awarded more than \$8.7 million in 2,629 grants to support humanities programs all over the state.

# EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL

By Georgia Green Stamper

Kentucky Humanities has been “telling Kentucky’s stories” for a half century now. I haven’t been at it quite that long, but for a good while I have been scattering my tales across the state like a storytelling Johnny Appleseed. My hope, always, is that they will spread, root sprout to root sprout, encouraging others to speak their own.

Often, however, the would-be storytellers I meet seem bewildered as to how to share their stories. I stress to them that there is no right way. It can be as simple—as important—as scribbling notes on a tablet for their grandchildren. It is the doing that matters.

My native Owen County, for example, has recently inspired three extremely different approaches to telling the story of its tobacco-growing agrarian past. Labor intensive but profitable, the cultivation of burley tobacco defined the culture of the region’s proud, self-reliant people for nearly two centuries. Today, however, for various and valid reasons, few farmers raise tobacco. For those who remember how it once was, however, and for those who seek to know, I present the storyteller, the project organizer, and the poet.

Ron Wainscott and I knew each other at Owen County High School, but we hadn’t seen each other in decades until he dropped by one of my public talks to say hello. He also wanted advice on how to write his “little stories.” Ron allowed as how he’s not much of a book reader, much less a writer. But he’s a natural-born storyteller who grew up listening to the masters who once warmed the benches at every country store in the county. I advised him to talk his memories onto paper, writing them exactly the way he tells them. I wasn’t sure he’d follow through—too many people don’t—but 18 months later he called out of the blue to tell me he’d finished writing his book. How could he go about self-publishing a hundred copies to give to friends, he asked, and maybe to the local library?

His *Tell Me A Tale—About Growing Up at Lusby Mill* is a valuable resource for anyone researching the history of Ron’s rural community circa 1940s-1970s. Written in an authentic voice, his “little stories”—poignant, sometimes humorous, always factual—preserve an important contemporary account of a time, a place, and its people.

**Artist Carla Canonero Phillips was commissioned to create eight murals, painted throughout Owen County depicting the history and crop cycle of burley tobacco as a part of the Tobacco Heritage Trail.**

Photo by Ernie Stamper





Photo by Ernie Stamper

At another talk, Joy Morgan shared with me her vision for a Tobacco Heritage Trail through Owen County. A community volunteer prone to getting things done, she had already assembled a committee: Harold Malcolm, Frieda Smith, and Elizabeth Prewitt. Like her, they were longtime county residents who wanted to preserve the stories of the area’s vanishing tobacco-growing culture. Their first goal, Joy said, was to record oral interviews with Owen County farmers. If they could get a grant approved, they also hoped to have murals painted throughout the county depicting the history and crop cycle of burley tobacco.

Today, a dozen years later, that ambitious vision has become reality. With equipment loaned by the Kentucky Oral History Commission, Joy’s committee recorded 30 hours of interviews with 34 tobacco farmers, male and female, whose ages ranged from 40 to 80. These first-hand accounts of an era now past are archived at the Kentucky Historical Society and can be accessed in entirety at [visitowencountyky.org](http://visitowencountyky.org).

In time, the hoped-for grant came through and artist Carla Canonero Phillips was commissioned to create eight murals. These now are displayed on barns across Owen County and can also be viewed at [visitowencountyky.org](http://visitowencountyky.org). With our iPhone as our guide, my husband and I recently spent a delightful afternoon driving the Tobacco Heritage Trail. Links to brief excerpts from the farmers’ interviews relevant to each stunning mural rendered our tour even more meaningful.

I come last to the poet, Owen County native, Sherry Chandler. While few possess her talent, she is a wonderful example of the diverse ways our stories can be told. Chandler’s poems recount tobacco’s history—the good and the bad—and how its cultivation impacted her personally as well as generations of her Owen County family. The demanding crop that dominated their small patch of earth ruled the calendar and parameters of their lives. From early spring’s burning of the plant beds in “Fires at Night” to “Tying a Hand” in a winter stripping room, she takes the reader through tobacco’s seasons with her family. The depth of her understanding, merged with her mastery of language, capture the essence of the old tobacco-growing culture and the tenacious people it produced.

Now, that way of life is as obsolete as the buggy whip. The particulars of that time survive, however, because people like Ron Wainscott, Joy Morgan’s committee and the farmers they interviewed, and Sherry Chandler told their Kentucky stories.

When and how will you tell yours?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georgia Green Stamper is a Kentucky writer whose published works include *Butter in the Morning* and *You Can Go Anywhere*. Her newest book, *Small Acreages*, will be available in May from Shadelandhouse Modern Press. She is a graduate of Transylvania University.

*“So, passing there this morning and seeing the house was gone reminded me of all these little stories.... It also reminded me that nothing is permanent, even “The Home Places.”*

– Ron Wainscott, *Tell Me a Tale*



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