



PRESS RELEASE

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Humanities Council Announces History Alive! Characters for 2017

Charleston, WV — The popular *History Alive!* program of the West Virginia Humanities Council announces its roster of historical figures available for presentations beginning November 1 through October 31, 2017. The characters now available are:

- **Gabriel Arthur**, 17th century frontiersman, portrayed by Doug Wood of Hurricane,
- **Nellie Bly**, 19th century reporter, portrayed by JoAnn Peterson of Kingwood,
- **Julia Child**, the First Lady of Food, portrayed by Karen Vuranch of Fayetteville,
- **Benjamin Franklin**, founding father, portrayed by Leon Alexander of Charleston,
- **Stonewall Jackson**, Civil War general, portrayed by Doug Riley of Tunnelton,
- **Ostenaco**, Cherokee leader, portrayed by Doug Wood of Hurricane,
- **Minnie Pearl**, country comedienne, portrayed by Denise Giardina of Charleston,
- **Eleanor Roosevelt**, first lady and activist, portrayed by Patty Cooper of Vienna,
- **Theodore Roosevelt**, 26th president, portrayed by Gene Worthington of Fayetteville,
- **Sacagawea**, Lewis & Clark Expedition Native American guide and translator, portrayed by Mary Dailey of Meadow Bridge,
- **Harriet Tubman**, Underground Railroad leader, portrayed by Ilene Evans of Thomas, and
- **Mark Twain**, American literary icon, portrayed by Doug Riley of Tunnelton,

The characters of Gabriel Arthur and Nellie Bly are new to the program. Arthur is believed to be the first white man to see the Kanawha Valley while traveling with a band of Indians in 1674. He was sent with a partner and others from Fort Henry (present Petersburg, Virginia) to explore western lands and trade with the Indians. His partner was killed and Arthur traveled widely with the natives, apparently participating in raids in the Ohio Valley and elsewhere. During this time, he followed the Big Coal River to its mouth at

the Kanawha River. Arthur and the southern Indians with whom he traveled were welcomed at the large Moneton Indian village at present St. Albans before he returned to Fort Henry.

Nellie Bly was the pen name of Elizabeth Jane Cochrane who became a world famous reporter for the *New York World* in the late 1800s. To get the job she succeeded in getting herself committed for 10 days to the infamous lunatic asylum known as Blackwell's Island in New York. Her resulting newspaper series on the conditions and treatment of the institutionalized women led to improvements in the care for the mentally ill. In November of 1889 she started her highly publicized race around the world against the fictional Phineas Fogg of the Jules Verne book *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Traveling alone she made it in a little more than 72 days and was a sensation.

The *History Alive!* program brings historical figures to life through first-person portrayals by presenters who have conducted scholarly research on their character. The programs provide entertaining and educational experiences by allowing audiences to explore history through interaction with important people from the past. Presentations are available for \$150 to a variety of both nonprofit and for-profit organizations throughout West Virginia including schools, libraries, museums, historical societies, civic groups, festivals, associations, parks, businesses and others.

Information on all the *History Alive!* characters and how to schedule a presentation can be found at www.wvhumanities.org or by contacting Humanities Council Program Officer Mark Payne at 304-346-8500 or payne@wvhumanities.org.
