

West Virginia *Humanities Council*

PRESS RELEASE

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HUMANITIES COUNCIL STEPS UP WEB CONTENT TO HELP WEST VIRGINIANS THROUGH CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWNS

As the current health crisis has disrupted public programming at libraries, colleges, and other institutions, the West Virginia Humanities Council has begun releasing a variety of content on web and social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.

“Even in the current moment, when physical distancing is necessary to supporting public health, our need for connection and contact doesn’t go away,” says Council executive director Eric Waggoner. “The humanities--history, literature, culture, and living traditions--connect us to each other and to the world, across time and distance. We’re in a unique position to provide programming that helps West Virginians stay connected, in a time when many struggle with feeling isolated.”

Just days after many states initiated public lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID-19 in March, the Council launched “Poetry During a Time of Crisis: WV Poets on Community, Resilience, and the Power of the Arts,” featuring self-recorded videos of select published poets from around the Mountain State, reading their own work in their own homes. New poets are posted every Tuesday and Friday through the end of May.

“This sort of ‘at-home, from-home’ reading series allows our many excellent West Virginia poets to read directly to audiences all around the state--all around the world, actually, through our social media platforms. Seeing the poets in their own home spaces gives these readings an intimate feel that a public reading couldn’t approximate. And it allows our audiences to hear poetry that demonstrates how the humanities can help ease the uncertainty of moments like the one we’re in currently.”

The videos are available on the Council’s Facebook page. So too are “Mysterious Mondays,” a series of 20-30 minute audiobooks read by Waggoner and Council Program Officer Kyle Warmack. Each week’s episode is a standalone story drawn from Melville Davisson Post’s 1918 compilation, *Uncle Abner: Master of Mysteries*, republished as a collaboration between West Virginia University Press and the Humanities Council in 2015. Post, a native of Harrison County who graduated from WVU and briefly practiced law in Wheeling in the 1890s, soon gave up lawyering to become a hugely successful mystery fiction writer in the early 1900s.

One of Post’s most enduring literary creations was the stern, devoutly religious Uncle Abner, a cattleman in Harrison County (based on Post’s own experiences growing up in cattle country near Clarksburg), who uses a keen eye for clues and a keener knowledge of the human spirit to solve mysteries on the rough frontier in Harrison and the surrounding counties before the Civil War.

“I began reading the Abner stories as all the uncertainty around COVID-19 began,” says Warmack, “and they were so satisfying. Abner’s strong moral compass, his righteous protection of the innocent, and his firm belief in democracy were so reassuring to hear in this cultural moment, we here at the Council thought Abner would be a great thing to share with all West Virginians. They’re also just a lot of fun.”

Though the stories themselves are read in an audio-only format, the Council’s videos are posted with title cards explaining obscure terms or historical references within each story, making them more accessible to all readers. Both “Poetry During a Time of Crisis” and “Uncle Abner” are available on the Council’s Facebook page and YouTube channel, which can also be accessed through wvhumanities.org/programs/in-a-time-of-crisis. For more information, email Program Officer Kyle Warmack at warmack@wvhumanities.org, or call 304.346.8500 and leave a voicemail. Email is advised since, per Governor Justice’s stay-at-home order, Council staff is working remotely.

The West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
