



Humanities Council Hires State Folklorist

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Charleston – The West Virginia Humanities Council announces the hiring of a state folklorist. The position, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, marks the first time a West Virginia state folklorist has been employed in an official capacity.

Emily Hilliard, formerly of Washington, D.C., joined the Humanities Council in November to document the folklife traditions of the Mountain State. Hilliard earned her M.A. in folklore from the University of North Carolina, and holds a B.A. in English and French from the University of Michigan.

She previously worked for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and also with Maryland Traditions/Sandy Spring Museum, the National Council for the Traditional Arts, the North Carolina Folklore Society, and as a freelance food writer. An old-time musician and dancer herself, Hilliard is familiar with West Virginia’s cultural heritage through her work with the Coal River Folklife Collection at the American Folklife Center, annual trips to the Appalachian String Band Music Festival at Clifftop and other traditional music and dance events in the state, and via articles about Helvetia she published for the Southern Foodways Alliance and for National Public Radio.

“We are pleased to welcome Emily to the Humanities Council,” Executive Director Ken Sullivan said. “West Virginia has a rich folk culture and a long history of the practice of folklore. She will have plenty of work to do and high standards to meet.”

In her new role, Hilliard will conduct a statewide fieldwork survey to assess and document current folklife activity in West Virginia. From there, she will develop programming and collaborate with other organizations to promote and preserve West Virginia's cultural heritage and living traditions. Initiatives may include a master-apprentice program to encourage amateurs to learn a traditional art or craft from an established practitioner, concerts and festivals, heritage trails, exhibits, publications, podcasts, albums, and more. Hilliard will also contribute folklife content to *e-WV*, the Humanities Council's online encyclopedia of West Virginia history and culture (wvencyclopedia.org), and will write a regular column for *GOLDENSEAL* magazine.

Emily Hilliard may be reached at hilliard@wvhumanities.org or (304) 346-8500.

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The West Virginia Humanities Council is a nonprofit corporation governed by a board of directors whose members are drawn from all parts of West Virginia. It is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, supported by the NEH, the State of West Virginia, and by contributions from the private sector. The purposes of the West Virginia Humanities Council are educational, and its mission is to support a vigorous program in the humanities statewide in West Virginia.