Spring 2008

People & Mountains

A Publication of the West Virginia Humanities Council

Bil Lepp once said that his brother, the late storyteller Paul Lepp, was "West Virginia's greatest unelected liar." With Paul gone, that distinction without doubt falls to Bil. The five-time champion of the West Virginia State Liars Contest and a veteran of the National Storytelling Festival, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, and other events nationwide, he is by universal acclaim one of our best storytellers. Bil will take part in the Mountain State Storytelling Institute, coming up April 4-5 in Fairmont and sponsored by a grant from the West Virginia Humanities Council. We offer the following story from Bil Lepp's book, Inept, Impaired, Overwhelmed*, to whet your appetite.*

Storyteller Bil Lepp figures out deer hunting: Good Luck and Good Skating

Deer hunters are always looking for ways to improve their edge over our antlered quarry and I believe I have come up with the best solution yet. It is a simple idea that will put an end to dousings in deer scents, the deer stand, and camouflage. In fact, the deer hunter will no longer need to hide at all, but rather make himself as loud as possible.

Now, I have a nice rifle and boxes of shells with various loads, but I believe that if I could shoot a car out of my gun, I'd have a much better chance of bagging a deer. Not because cars are larger than bullets, but rather because deer seem more inclined to be killed by cars.

The next time you drive to your favorite shooting range, conduct a small scientific test. Count the number of dead deer along the shoulder of the roadway. Next, count the number of dead deer lying on the shoulder of the shooting range. I'll wager a fair amount that there are more dead deer on the road. Clearly, deer walk into the path of oncoming cars with much greater frequency than they do into the path of oncoming bullets. So, a car-shaped projectile would certainly be more effective than a bullet-shaped projectile.

Auto manufacturers make no secret of the fact that they design cars to resemble bullets for all of the obvious aerodynamic benefits. So why should munitions companies be shy about making car-shaped bullets? Experience testifies to the fact that any self-respecting deer would gladly step in front of your newest car. Your chances of killing a deer with your car multiply exponentially based on the car's make and model, how much you paid, and how much you love the car. If you buy a 1974 Honda Civic you will never, ever, hit a deer. If you buy a brand new Corvette with the Indy 500 package, you will hit a deer before you get off the lot. If Winchester or Remington would just make a Corvette-shaped bullet you could step onto the porch of your hunting lodge, fire, and deer would line up to collide with your bullet.

Continued on page 3

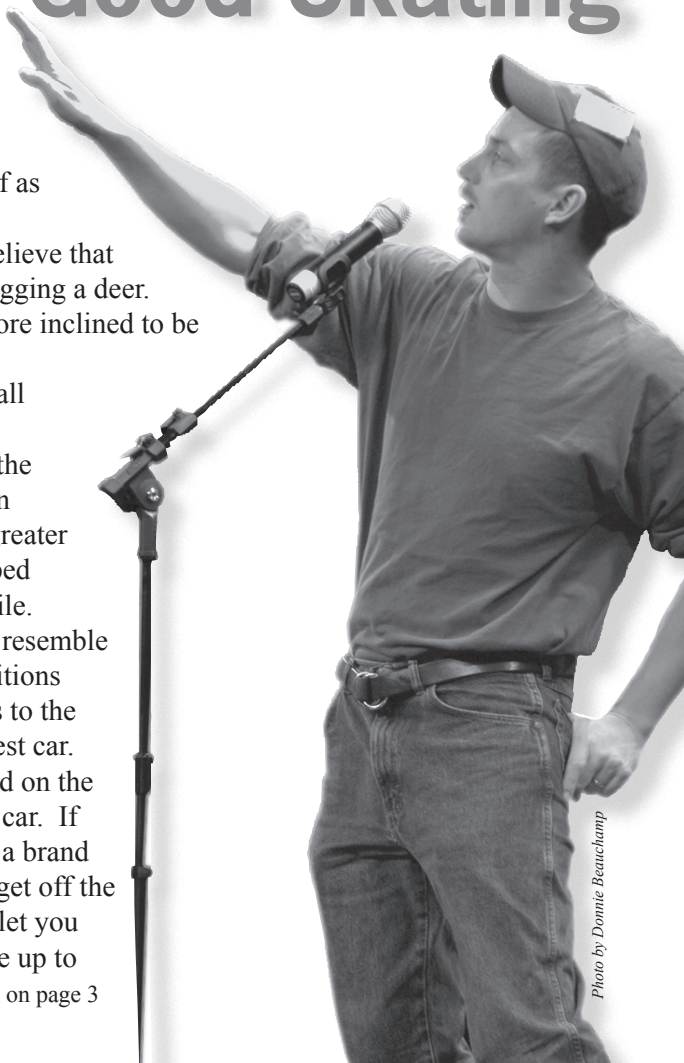

Photo by Donnie Beauchamp

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Mile 58

I was delighted when a Midland Trail milepost sign recently materialized in front of the 1836 MacFarland-Hubbard House, our Charleston headquarters. Nowadays we know the street past our place as Kanawha Boulevard, itself a beautiful piece of civil engineering dating to the Roosevelt Administration, but it is good to be reminded that the story goes back a lot further than that.

The Midland Trail, as you may learn in the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*, was one of early America's most important roadways. Known in the 19th century as the James River & Kanawha Turnpike, it connected the eastern settlements of Virginia to the Ohio Valley. The Indians had used the same route for similar purposes of east-west travel, and before them the wild buffalo.

In time the trail became a dirt-road turnpike and then, as U.S. 60, a modern two-lane highway. It received the Midland Trail moniker in the 1930s, when the great transcontinental auto routes were being touted by boosters along the way. In its heyday, U.S. 60 ran from Virginia Beach to L.A., and you can still follow it almost to the California line.

A road of such longevity plainly has found the path of least resistance. Crossing from the James River watershed to the headwaters of the Kanawha, the Midland Trail followed the Greenbrier, New, and Kanawha rivers before diverting down Teays Valley to the broad Ohio. The old C&O main line followed the same course for the same reason, and as CSX it still does, having run trains within sight of my office window for nearly a century and a half.

Today, the Midland Trail Scenic Highway Association promotes U.S. 60 in West Virginia. We credit them with our new sign (page 4), and occasionally we are able to advance their programs with Humanities Council grants.

The Midland Trail is history's highway. It has carried America's commerce westward for as long as there has been a country. It still does, counting the railroad and I-64 as surrogates, and each year thousands of barges move down the river itself. People in their millions have joined the flow of goods, from Daniel Boone and Mary Draper Ingles to Chelsea Clinton and George W. Bush.

Chances are, you find yourself in this well-worn corridor from time to time. If so, we welcome you to drop by our old house. Wayfarers have done that for more than 170 years, and they continue to do so.

Just stop when you get to Mile 58.

— Ken Sullivan

People & Mountains is published quarterly by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

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We welcome reader letters, freelance manuscripts, and financial contributions. Please address all correspondence to West Virginia Humanities Council 1310 Kanawha Blvd., E. Charleston, WV 25301 or email sonis@wvhumanities.org.

The West Virginia Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, serves West Virginia through grants and direct programs in the humanities.

Continued from page 1

Unfortunately, the car-shaped projectile is just a dream. But fear not, brother hunter, for I have come up with an idea that you can apply the next time you head out into the woods. Instead of stopping at the sporting goods store on your way out of town, stop at your local hardware store. Buy about six hundred yards of roll roofing, a can of yellow spray paint, and a pair of roller skates.

Your chances of killing a deer with your car multiply exponentially based on the car's make and model, how much you paid, and how much you love the car.

Find a clearing in the woods and stretch out the roll roofing. Next, take the can of yellow paint and spray two parallel lines down the center of the roll roofing. When you are done, what your should have is a decoy roadway. You might want to add potholes or a construction site, just for authenticity. That done, put on the roller skates and speed back and forth yelling "VROOOOOOOOOM!" at the top of your lungs. That should bring the deer right to you. They will think that a new road has been built and they will rush to the area to destroy your car. Much like trout fishermen who "watch the hatch" to determine the best fly to use, you might want to spend some time at an actual, nearby road to get a feel for what kind of cars are most prevalent in the region. Try and sound like the local cars.

In all my Boy Scout and ROTC classes on gun safety, I never once had an instructor mention gun safety while on roller skates. There are only two possible reasons for this: Either everyone who has ever tried it is dead, their wives having secretly buried the bodies before the information became public knowledge, or the idea has never been tried. I suspect the former is closer to the truth. Men will try anything, and the stupider the better. That means that somewhere out there a woman has forfeited her husband's life insurance policy, claiming he ran off, rather than living with the embarrassment of telling the truth.

The stickiest issue in this whole scheme is stopping before you broadside the deer. You want to shoot him, not ram him. While automobiles often win battles against deer, humans on roller skates generally fare worse. You have a number of options here. You can practice leaping the deer, like an ice skater leaping oil barrels, but that solution poses a myriad of difficulties. Unless you were captain of your 1974 high school disco-skating team, you might want to steer clear of leaping the deer.

The next option is what I like to call Deliberate Use of Recoil. Use the biggest load you can find. Load your own shell if you can. Pack in enough powder so that as soon as you fire, your forward momentum is checked, knocking you in the opposite direction. You will want to practice skating backwards through the woods at high speed. Try and have a good idea where low-hanging branches are.

The last option is still in the experimental stages. I call it the Reentry Solution and use space shuttle technology here. Refit the butt of your rifle so that it sticks up and over your shoulder a good six inches. Install in this modified butt a parachute. Rig a small charge to the parachute so that when you pull the trigger, the bullet fires normally and the secondary blast discharges the parachute behind you. The parachute, if properly deployed, should slow you down dramatically, just as it does when the *Endeavor* lands.

So, there you have it. Good luck, good skating, and good hunting.

— Bil Lepp

There's more! *This story, originally titled "Deer Hunting, Detroit Style," is reprinted from* Inept, Impaired, Overwhelmed*, by Bil Lepp, and is also available on his CD,* The Divine Bovine*. To order, visit www.buck-dog.com, phone (304)744-2126, or write to P.O. Box 5232, Charleston, WV 25361. For booking information contact Paula Lepp at the phone number listed above or at bil.lepp@verizon.net.*

Stories to be told. Fairmont State University and the West Virginia Storytelling Guild will host the Mountain State Storytelling Institute on April 4-5. The conference, funded by the Humanities Council, will bring scholars and storytellers together.

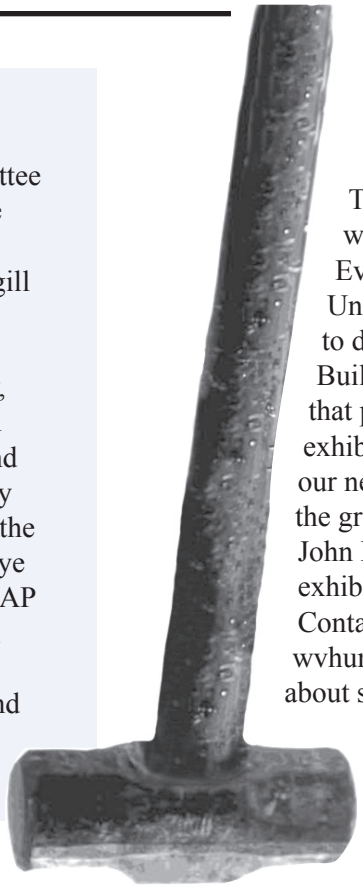
The public is invited to a free evening of storytelling on Friday, April 4, beginning at 7:30 p.m., at Fairmont State's Falcon Center. Additional programs include presentations by Joseph Sobol, director of the master's degree program in storytelling at East Tennessee State University, and Bil Lepp, the subject of our cover story. Storytelling Guild members, including Kevin Cordi (with children above), will conduct workshops. For more information, contact Francene Kirk at (304)367-4170 or fkirk@fairmontstate.edu.

What's New in the Humanities

Committee Members Elected

The 24-member Humanities Council program committee makes programming and grants recommendations to the Council board of directors. Four citizen members were recently elected to serve three-year terms. Pauline Sturgill of Logan County, a returning member, is the director of APPALREAD at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College; Kevin Barksdale, Cabell County, is an assistant professor of American history at Marshall University, with extensive experience in Appalachian and coalfields history; Robert Bridges of Monongalia County is assistant professor of art at WVU and curator of both the WVU art collection and the Mesaros Galleries; and Sallye Clark of Kanawha County teaches English, speech, and AP Language and Composition at George Washington High School.

We thank members Larry Grimes, Jo Ann Harman, and Kristina Olson, who rotated off the committee this year, for their service and good work.



John Henry Hits the Road

The Humanities Council is working again with Professor Eve Faulkes and her West Virginia University graphic design students to develop another traveling exhibit. Building on the unique collaboration that produced the award-winning exhibit *Born of Rebellion* in 2005, our new exhibit tells the story of the great West Virginia folk hero John Henry. Plans call for the exhibit to be available by summer. Contact (304)346-8500 or payne@wvhumanities.org for information about scheduling *John Henry: The Steel Drivin' Man* to appear in your community.

Staff News

Amy Saunders is the new grants administrator at the West Virginia Humanities Council. She comes to the Council from the West Virginia Attorney General's office where she served as consumer coordinator, reviewed proposals for funding, and coordinated the statewide work of the Attorney General's Advisory Council. A native West Virginian, she is an honors graduate of West Virginia State University where she earned a B.S. in communications.

Saunders will work with applicants for Humanities Council grants that range from $1,500 to $25,000 and are awarded statewide to support programs, events, and projects in the humanities.

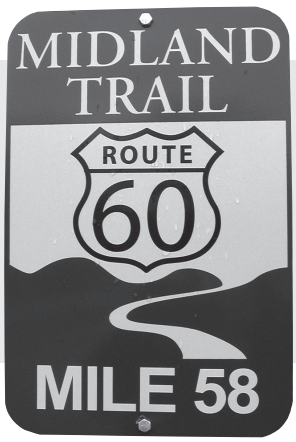
"The Humanities Council accomplishes some of its best work through the work of other people. These are the people who apply for and are awarded Council grants," said executive director Ken Sullivan. "Amy is committed to expanding the audience we serve. We welcome her to the Council."

Contact Amy Saunders at (304)346-8500 or saunders@wvhumanities.org for grant applications and guidelines.

May we email?

The Humanities Council is compiling a master list of email addresses to keep members and supporters informed about events and programs. If you want to hear from us via the Internet, please send your email address to nutter@wvhumanities.org.

Smile as you go by! The Midland Trail Scenic Highway Association recently erected milepost signs along the historic highway aka U.S. Route 60 and Charleston's Kanawha Boulevard. Mile 58 falls directly in front of the 1836 MacFarland-Hubbard House, our headquarters.



Ed Welch at the February Little Lecture.

Lectures Dedicated to Wehrle's Memory

Each spring the West Virginia Humanities Council presents its Little Lectures, a popular series of parlor talks at the historic MacFarland-Hubbard House in Charleston. The 2008 lectures are dedicated to the memory of Martha Gaines Wehrle through the generous support of Jill Wilson and Russ Isaacs. Martha Wehrle, who served in the state legislature in both the House and Senate, was a former Humanities Council board member and a respected community leader.

"We wanted to remember Martha in a meaningful way with emphasis on community. The Humanities Council Little Lectures do just that," said Wilson, a former Council board president.

The first lecture was presented on February 24 by University of Charleston president Ed Welch, who spoke to a packed house about the role of religion in modern society. The remaining Little Lectures are *Museum Without Walls: Charleston's Spring Hill Cemetery Park* by Richard Andre, March 30; *The Monongah Mine Disaster of 1907* by Davitt McAteer, April 27; and *The Last Memoir of Mary Lee Settle* by Anne Hobson Freeman, June 1. Before her untimely death, Wehrle had expressed a particular interest in a Mary Lee Settle lecture.

Admission is $10 and includes a reception following the program. Seating is limited and reservations are encouraged. Contact (304)346-8500 or email payne@wvhumanities.org.

Briefs

Travel Grants Awarded

The Humanities Council awarded six Travel Assistance Program grants, up to $500 each, to help West Virginians attend humanities conferences from Denver to Huntington: Melissa May, Pricketts Fort, American Association of Museums, Denver; Kisor Chakrabarti, Bethany College, American Philosophical Association, Los Angeles; Dean Hardman and Jeff Wyne, Jackson's Mill, Association of Living History, Morrisville, Pennsylvania; Shirley Stewart Burns, Charleston, and Neil Richardson, St. Albans Historical Society, Appalachian Studies Association, Huntington. For more information contact saunders@wvhumanities.org or (304)346-8500.

Minigrants Deadline Approaches

April 1, the next deadline in the Humanities Council grants cycle, is for minigrants which support small projects, single events, or planning and consultation work. These awards, $1,500 or less, have recurring deadlines the first of June, August, October, December, and February. Contact grants administrator Amy Saunders as indicated above or visit wvhumanities.org for more information.

Smithsonian Exhibit Sites Selected

New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music, the Smithsonian Institution's exhibit highlighting roots music performers such as Bill Monroe, the Carter Family, Bessie Smith, Bob Wills and Woody Guthrie, will travel to six West Virginia communities beginning April 2009: Morgan County Public Library, Berkeley Springs; Grafton's B&O Railroad Heritage Center; the Randolph County Community Arts Center, Elkins; the Historical Foundation in Williamson; the Youth Museum of Southern West Virginia in Beckley; and the Nicholas Old Main Foundation, Summersville. *New Harmonies* is sponsored by the Humanities Council through the Museum on Main Street program.

John Adams and Baseball!

The National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Library Association are offering the following traveling exhibits to libraries: *John Adams Unbound*, which explores Adams's personal library of 3,500 books, and *Pride and Passion: The African American Baseball Experience*, the story of black baseball players in the U.S. over the past century and a half. Host libraries receive a $2,500 grant for exhibit-related expenses. Online application deadline is April 4. For more information visit www.neh.gov.

Thank You, New and Renewing Members and Donors!

This list represents new and renewed memberships and other donations received November 1, 2007, through January 31, 2008.
A complete list of members and donors is published each year in the Humanities Council's annual report.

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Pergola Perking Along

Our pergola project will add valuable exterior program space to the historic MacFarland-Hubbard House. We anticipate frequent use of the space for our popular Sunday afternoon Little Lectures and other programs and events. Our thanks to the Daywood Foundation, Herscher Foundation, and the Bernard H. and Blanche E. Jacobson Foundation and other donors for their early support. Please join them by sending your tax-deductible contribution to the West Virginia Humanities Council, 1310 Kanawha Boulevard, E., Charleston 25301 or contact Michelle Walker at (304)346-8500 or walker@wvhumanities.org.

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Bus With Us!

Deluxe Shepherdstown Tour

with the West Virginia Humanities Council

July 18 -19, 2008 - Theater, History & Fine Food

Our trip departs Charleston Friday morning,* July 18, heading out to lunch at Lakeview Resort before traveling on to the Eastern Panhandle and the Bavarian Inn. After dinner we'll attend the Contemporary American Theater Festival to enjoy an evening of comedic theater from Tony Award-winning playwright Greg Kotis. We will spend the night at the Bavarian Inn, have breakfast, take a walking tour of historic downtown Shepherdstown, then settle back for a scenic journey to Elkins to dine at Graceland's Victorian mansion.

Cost includes transportation, lodging, meals, entertainment, & gratuities.

Cost per person for double occupancy $300

Cost per person for single occupancy $330

*Morgantown passengers will depart Friday at lunch and return Saturday

Full Payment Must Be Received By May 15, 2008.

Reservation Coupon

Send $100 deposit per person or full payment, payable to:
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1310 Kanawha Blvd. E. Charleston, WV 25301
Contact (304)346-8500 or walker@wvhumanities.org

[ ] My check to WVHC for $_____ is enclosed.

# of People: Double Occupancy _____ Single Occupancy _____

[ ] Or charge my (circle one): VISA or MasterCard

I wish to pay: Total $ _____ / Deposit $ _____

Card #_____

Exp. Date _____ _____
(Signature)

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(City) (State) (Zip)

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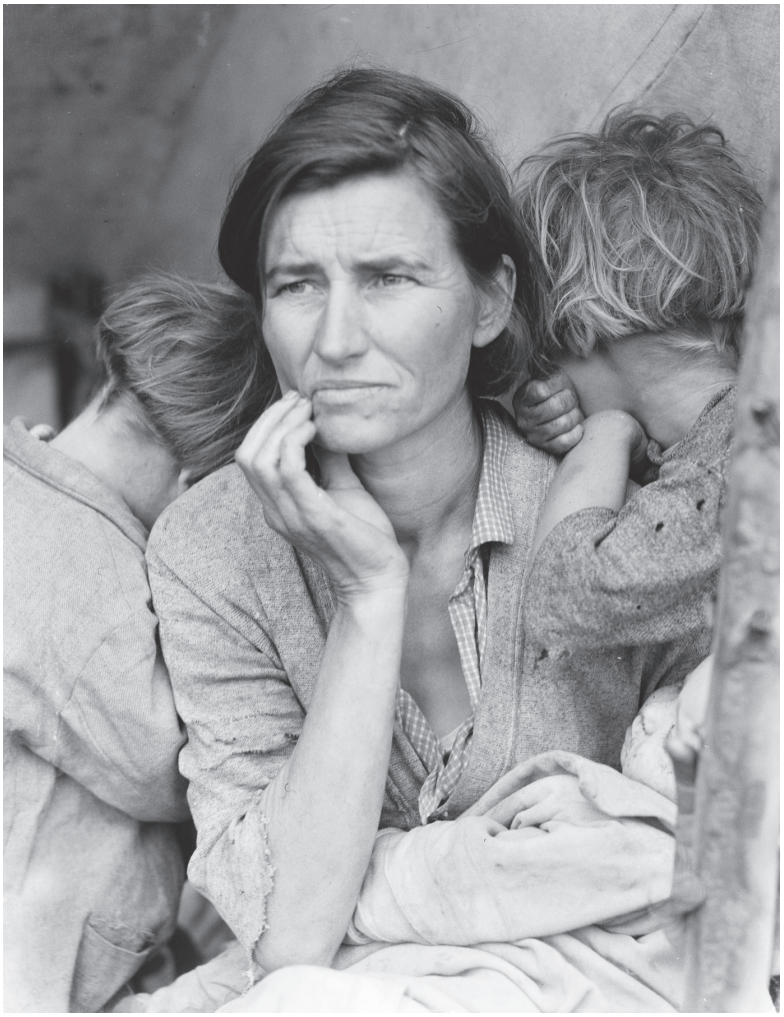
CANCELLATIONS MUST BE MADE 30 DAYS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE.

West Virginia Humanities Council assumes no responsibility for damage, injury, loss, accident, delay or inconvenience from whatever cause during this trip. We reserve the right to change the tour itinerary if necessary, or to cancel the trip due to conditions beyond our control (including insufficient participation), with full refund in the case of cancellation.



Picturing America. The National Endowment for the Humanities recently announced *Picturing America*, whose purpose is to provide high-quality reproductions of iconic American art to the nation's classrooms and libraries. The program was created in cooperation with the American Library Association to promote the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture.

The new program is part of the NEH "We The People" initiative. The goal of *Picturing America* is "to give kids . . . the chance to see this art," said NEH Chairman Bruce Cole, himself a distinguished art historian. "It can play a role in their lives, as much as music or sports."

According to *Humanities* magazine, *Picturing America* presents a variety of subjects suitable for kindergartners and high school students alike. The images may be grouped to show many perspectives on American history, from colonial portraits to modern architecture.

***Picturing America* features 40 images, including Dorothea Lange's 1936 *Migrant Mother and Children* (left), Farm Security Administration photograph, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.** Teachers and librarians may apply to participate by April 15 at picturingamerica.neh.gov.

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