

A Publication of the West Virginia Humanities Council

Sir Neil Cossons, the retired head of Great Britain's principal historic preservation agency, toured West Virginia in 2013 at the invitation of the Humanities Council. He spoke to appreciative audiences in Charles Town, Morgantown, and Wheeling, as part of our observance of National Historic Preservation Month.

As we got to know Sir Neil better, we were pleased to learn that he has a long-standing affection for the Mountain State. He sent this essay following his visit.

When I tell colleagues in Britain that my favorite state in the United States is West Virginia they listen with polite curiosity. But when I say the same to American friends I'm often greeted with surprise. Many people at home need to be reminded just where West Virginia is and why it's different from Virginia. I think this is excusable. Why Americans should be surprised is more of a puzzle. But as a clue I suggest that the Mountain State is such a hidden gem as to be almost invisible – this despite John Denver and "Country Roads."

My first visit to the United States – and to West Virginia – was in 1965, when I was awarded a travel fellowship linked to the bicentennial of the birth of James Smithson, for whom the Smithsonian

Almost Heaven

An Englishman's view of West Virginia

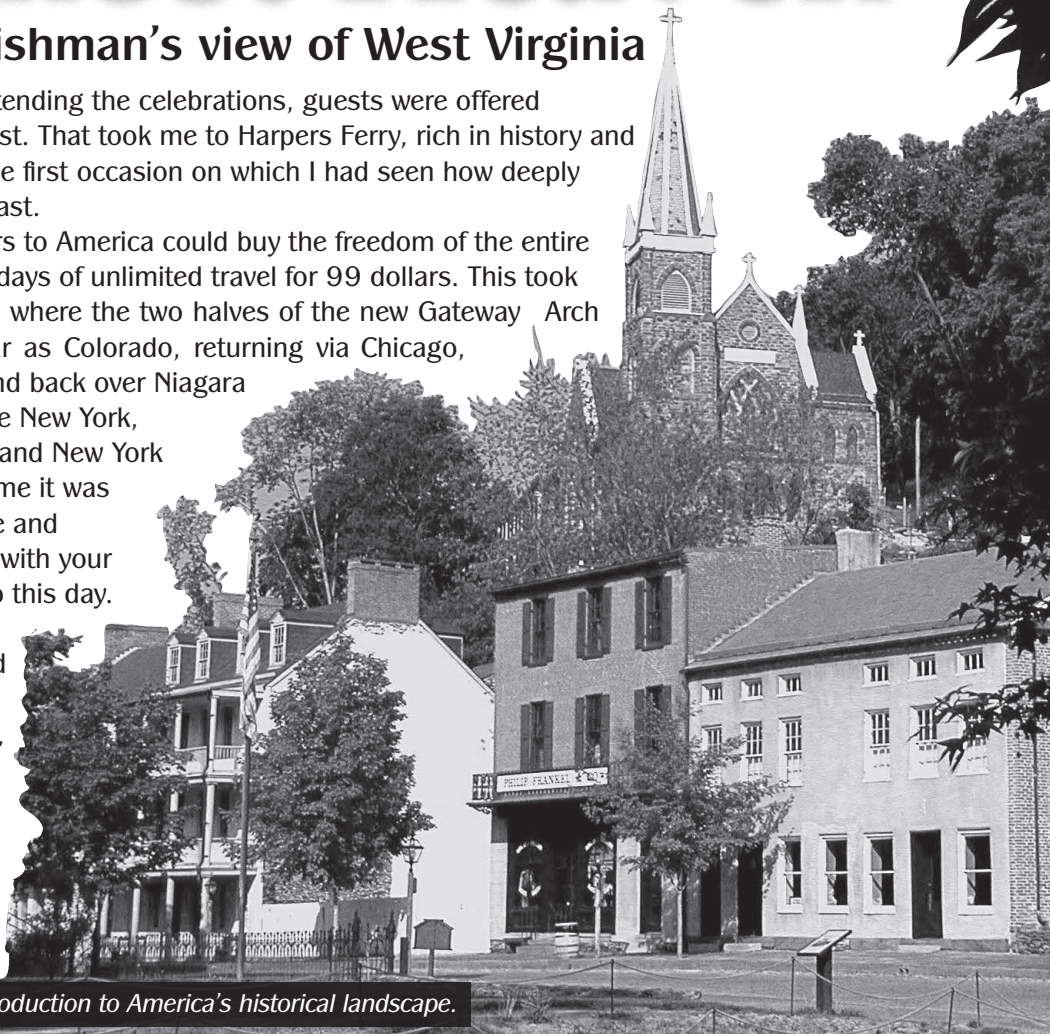
Institution is named. After attending the celebrations, guests were offered excursions to places of interest. That took me to Harpers Ferry, rich in history and – for a foreigner like me – the first occasion on which I had seen how deeply Americans care about their past.

In those days foreign visitors to America could buy the freedom of the entire Greyhound bus network, 99 days of unlimited travel for 99 dollars. This took me west through St. Louis – where the two halves of the new Gateway Arch were about to meet – as far as Colorado, returning via Chicago, Detroit, briefly into Canada and back over Niagara Falls, on to Corning in upstate New York, then Boston, Mystic Seaport and New York City, before flying home. For me it was a transformational experience and the beginning of a love affair with your country that has continued to this day.

In the mid-'60s everyone could be found on Greyhound buses. I met hundreds of friendly and generous people, ready to offer help at every turn, proud of their country and curious about mine.

But West Virginia needed more mature reflection, so

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Harpers Ferry was Sir Neil's introduction to America's historical landscape.

Appalachian Studies Conference Returns to West Virginia: The Appalachian Studies Association comes to Marshall University for its 37th annual conference on March 28 through 30. The Association, which has supported writing, research and teaching related to the Appalachian region since 1977, is headquartered at Marshall and last met in West Virginia in 2008. For more information contact Mary Thomas at mthomas@marshall.edu or (304)696-2904.

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Grant Categories

The Humanities Council welcomes applications in the following grant categories:

Major Grants (\$20,000 maximum) support humanities events: symposiums, exhibits, conferences, lectures.
Due: *Feb. 1, Sept. 1

Minigrants (\$1,500 maximum) support small projects, single events, or planning and consultation.
Due: *Feb. 1, April 1, June 1, Oct. 1

Fellowships (\$2,500) support research and writing projects for humanities faculty and independent scholars.
Due: *Feb. 1

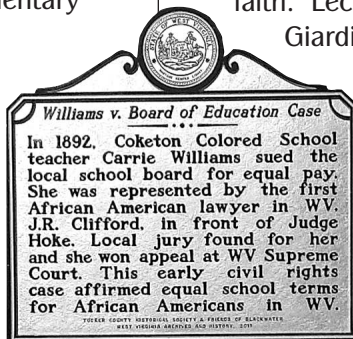
Media Grants (\$20,000 maximum) support the production of electronic or film materials, or a newspaper series. **Due:** Sept. 1

Publication Grants (\$20,000 maximum) support the production phase of a completed manuscript by recognized nonprofit and academic presses.
Due: Sept. 1

Teacher Institute Grants (\$25,000 maximum) are available to colleges and universities and support summer seminars for secondary and elementary teachers.
Due: Sept. 1

* Approaching Deadlines!

Visit www.wvhumanities.org for applications and guidelines, or call (304)346-8500.



Preservation Alliance of West Virginia received Humanities Council funding to create a traveling exhibit titled *Preserving West Virginia, Saving Communities*. The exhibit will educate audiences about the benefits of historic preservation including economic development and the revitalization of communities. It shows how historic sites are being re-used, and also features endangered properties such as the pavilion at Blue Sulphur Springs (at left above). *Preserving West Virginia*, available free of charge to suitable locations, is at the Darden House in Elkins until February 13. For more information contact Danielle LaPresta at dlapresta@pawv.org or (304)572-2951.

Little Lecture Series

Hoppy Kercheval, host of MetroNews Statewide Talkline, kicks off the Humanities Council Little Lecture Series on March 30. The long-time radio talk show host will share his thoughts on the role of present-day commentary. The series also



Elizabeth Roth/New South Media

features author Carter Taylor Seaton on April 27 with a talk on her new book about the back-to-the-land movement in West Virginia. On May 18, West Virginia Historian Laureate Ron Lewis presents an overview of his new history of West Virginia University. State senator and Charleston business leader Brooks McCabe concludes the 2014 series on June 22 with a lecture on the economic history of the capital city. All lectures are on Sunday afternoons at 2:00 p.m. Admission is \$10 and includes refreshments. Seating is limited and reservations encouraged. Call (304)346-8500.

Faith and the Devil: The Clay Center's "Faith and the Devil" lecture series, supported by a Humanities Council grant, opens this spring in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title by multi-media artist Lesley Dill. On display from May to July, the exhibit investigates the philosophical conundrum of the coexistence of both evil and faith. Lectures in May and June will include talks by author Denise Giardina, symphony conductor Grant Cooper and others. An exhibit created by West Virginia State University students under the guidance of professor Paula Clendenin will display concurrently at the WVSU Foundation art gallery in downtown Charleston. Call (304)561-3570.

A new historic marker at the Tucker County Courthouse commemorates the accomplishment of African-American schoolteacher Carrie Williams, who in 1892 successfully sued the county school board for equal pay.

The case, argued by West Virginia's first black lawyer, was the subject of the Council-funded J. R. Clifford Project.

Hometown Teams

West Virginia was chosen as a debut state for the new Smithsonian traveling exhibit on America's love affair with local sports. *Hometown Teams: How Sports Shape America* will open on February 5 at the Parkersburg Art Center where it will run through March 15. The statewide tour is sponsored by the Humanities Council.

Hometown Teams addresses sports in the popular culture, examining such aspects as mascots, marching bands, cheerleaders, and game day traditions, as well as the teams themselves. Each exhibit site will develop local material celebrating their own sports traditions. Marshall University sports history professor Kat Williams is the tour scholar. After closing in Parkersburg, *Hometown Teams* will travel to the Larry Joe Harless Community Center in Gilbert, March 22-May 3; Preston County Sports Museum in Rowlesburg, May 11-June 21; Randolph County Community Arts Center in Elkins, June 29-August 9; Weirton Area Museum & Cultural Center, August 17-September 27; and Morgantown History Museum, October 5-November 15.



Michael Keller

The Summers County Bobcats, state champs 2007-2011, are among West Virginia's top hometown teams.

Folk Artists on Film

With the support of a Humanities Council grant, the Art Museum of West Virginia University will produce a film documenting the heritage of six Appalachian folk artists, including the work of Hinton wood sculptor S. L. Jones (right). Continuing work begun by folk art collectors Ramona Lampell and the late Millard Lampell, the film will depict the practices of each artist and how they used natural resources readily available to them. Only one of the artists, Kentucky carver Minnie Adkins, is still living. Footage shot more than 20 years ago will be included in the documentary. The Lampell collection, some parts of which now belong to the WVU museum, was featured in the lavishly illustrated 1989 book, *O, Appalachia*.



Tom Evans

History Alive! Beginning in January 2014, our popular *History Alive* programs are available for \$125 per presentation. These first-person portrayals of historic figures such as Mark Twain, Harriet Tubman, Babe Ruth, Cornstalk, and Eleanor Roosevelt will also be available for the first time to for-profit companies looking to add a uniquely entertaining and educational component to their meetings, conferences, training sessions, and other events. For information visit www.wvhumanities.org or contact program officer Mark Payne at (304)346-8500 or payne@wvhumanities.org.

Program Committee Election

Please help choose citizen members of the Humanities Council program committee. Your vote gives the public a voice in our grants and program decisions. Vote for four of the candidates below:

Chad Barnett, Ohio County, is Headmaster at the Linsly School in Wheeling. He earned his B.A. from Bethany College, and an M.A. in English Language and Literature from WVU.

Robert Enoch, Wood County, is president of the Wood County Historical and Preservation Society and also chairman of the Fort Boreman Park Commission. He now serves on the program committee and is eligible for reelection.

A. Waller Hastings, Ohio County, chairs the Humanities Department at West Liberty University. He previously taught at South Dakota's Northern State University and at Rutgers. He now serves on the program committee and is eligible for reelection.

Eric Waggoner, Upshur County, chairs the English Department at West Virginia Wesleyan College where he teaches American Literature and Cultural Studies. He has worked with the Humanities Council to bring visiting scholars to both Wesleyan and Marshall.

Myra Zeigler, Summers County, is director of the Summers County Public Library and secretary-treasurer of the Summers County Historic Landmarks Commission. She received her MLIS from the University of South Carolina. She now serves on the program committee and is eligible for reelection.

Return your ballot by mail to the West Virginia Humanities Council or email your choices to saunders@wvhumanities.org by February 28th.

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The West Virginia Humanities Council gratefully acknowledges support from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Office of the West Virginia Secretary of Education and the Arts; and foundations, corporations, and individuals throughout the Mountain State and beyond.

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in 1972 I returned with Eric Deloney of the Historic American Engineering Record and Emory Kemp, professor of engineering at West Virginia University, as my guides. Both were to become lifelong friends. One of my perpetual interests has been the history of industry and engineering, so West Virginia was something of a mecca – glass blowing in Morgantown, bee-hive coke ovens, the line of the B&O Railway, and the magnificent suspension bridge across the Ohio at Wheeling. I've been back again and again.

Little did I know then that nearly 30 years later my younger son, Malcolm – in 1972 just a few months old – would marry Jenny, a lovely girl from West Virginia. They and their two children now live in London. So, for me West Virginia is a special place. And the invitation from the West Virginia Humanities Council to speak there in May, in your state's 150th year, was irresistible.

First stop of my May tour was the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charles Town, where John Brown was tried and convicted in 1859, following his raid and subsequent capture at Harpers Ferry. Driving in from Washington, I arrived in torrential rain, so spent a quiet hour in the museum just along the road, drying out and soaking up the history. It offered a perceptive yet congenial insight into what has made Jefferson County tick over the centuries, and a good prelude to the evening.

I'd agreed to meet Mark Payne, Humanities Council program officer, at the courthouse at two o'clock to set up for the evening lecture. There was still a hearing in session, so we sat at the back and listened. At an appropriate moment Judge David Sanders briefly adjourned the court for us to check everything. Later on the judge presided over the evening events,

generously welcoming Ray Smock, Humanities Council board president, and a warm and friendly audience to his courthouse. Afterwards, I headed to picturesque Shepherdstown and overnight at the Bavarian Inn, an astonishing German enclave overlooking the Potomac.

Next day, on to Morgantown and a big audience at West Virginia University, chaired by Provost Michelle Wheatley, herself originally from England. Overnight with the Kemps – Emory and Janet – generous as always, before heading west again to Wheeling. Here the talk was in West Virginia Independence Hall, powerfully redolent of the great events of a century and a half ago. Built as the U.S. Custom House in 1860, later the home of the Restored Government of Virginia, it has been stylishly and expertly restored and provided a wonderfully evocative setting for an evening chaired by Susan Pierce, head of the state historic preservation office.

Three busy days confirmed again all my affection for West Virginia. There is an heroic quality about this great landscape, the long hauls up to the mountain ridges, breathtaking views across valleys ahead before the next long climb. And in between tiny communities full of character and individuality. I took my time on the drive back to Washington – in warm sunshine – and savoured something of a place that for me had more than lived up to being 'almost heaven.'

–Neil Cossons



People & Mountains is published three times a year by the West Virginia Humanities Council. We welcome reader letters, freelance manuscripts, and financial contributions. Please address correspondence to West Virginia Humanities Council, 1310 Kanawha Boulevard, E., Charleston, WV 25301 or email sonis@wvhumanities.org.