

West Virginia Humanities Council's Official Publication

Summer 2025

People & Mountains



Percival Everett
Pulitzer Prize Winner

Bringing the latest humanities news to thousands of households, schools, libraries, museums, colleges, and nonprofits across West Virginia and beyond!



From the Executive Director

"The arts and the humanities belong to all people of the United States. The encouragement and support of national progress and scholarship in the arts, while primarily a matter for private and local initiative, are also appropriate matters of concern to the Federal Government."



The legislation establishing the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities begins directly enough. But let's look at that second sentence more closely.

Recent weeks have given me new opportunities to discuss with citizens, journalists, and representatives why every sitting congress since 1974 has reaffirmed and supported our work. Beyond the public good accomplished by preserving, celebrating, and sharing West Virginia's history and cultural heritage, I think one major reason lies in the unique—indeed, the substantial—return on investment we represent.

As if to illustrate my point, on April 29, the Federation of State Humanities Councils with support from the Mellon Foundation dedicated \$15 million in emergency stabilization funds in response to the unprecedented cancellation of congress' support for our missions in our home states. That type of co-investment comes only when you have—as we do—a proven track record of efficiency and accomplishment that spans decades.

The legislation argues that federal support for the humanities is best accomplished by pooling public and private resources, maximizing the impact of both. And the best way to ensure that impact is to let the states run it.

We secure that shared investment by matching federal support dollar for dollar, through contributions from West Virginia's people, institutions, and businesses. Federal support for our work is the farthest thing from "entitlement spending." If we can't put up a matching dollar, we don't access a federal dollar. Period.

Our efforts cost the taxpayer less than one dollar per year. In return, our grants and programs serve all 55 counties and deliver over \$1 million annually to West Virginia's cultural network and economy, in support of local institutions such as historical societies, community centers, museums, town festivals, schools, and libraries.

That's how we ensure that tax dollars are returned to West Virginia, multiplied, to support programs that West Virginians themselves design, execute, and want to see continued. If federal support for the humanities councils is lost, it will not come back. It simply will leave West Virginia and never return.

For half a century, we have multiplied federal funding roughly 3-to-1 in support of West Virginia's cultural economy and heritage. Continued congressional investment in our work will ensure that we can help sustain both well into the future.

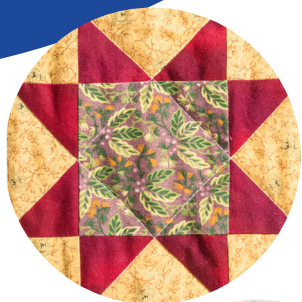
—Dr. Eric Waggoner

“The sun doesn’t
always shine in
West Virginia,
but the people do.”

—John F. Kennedy



*The West Virginia Humanities Council's
Historic Headquarters*



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Are Essential



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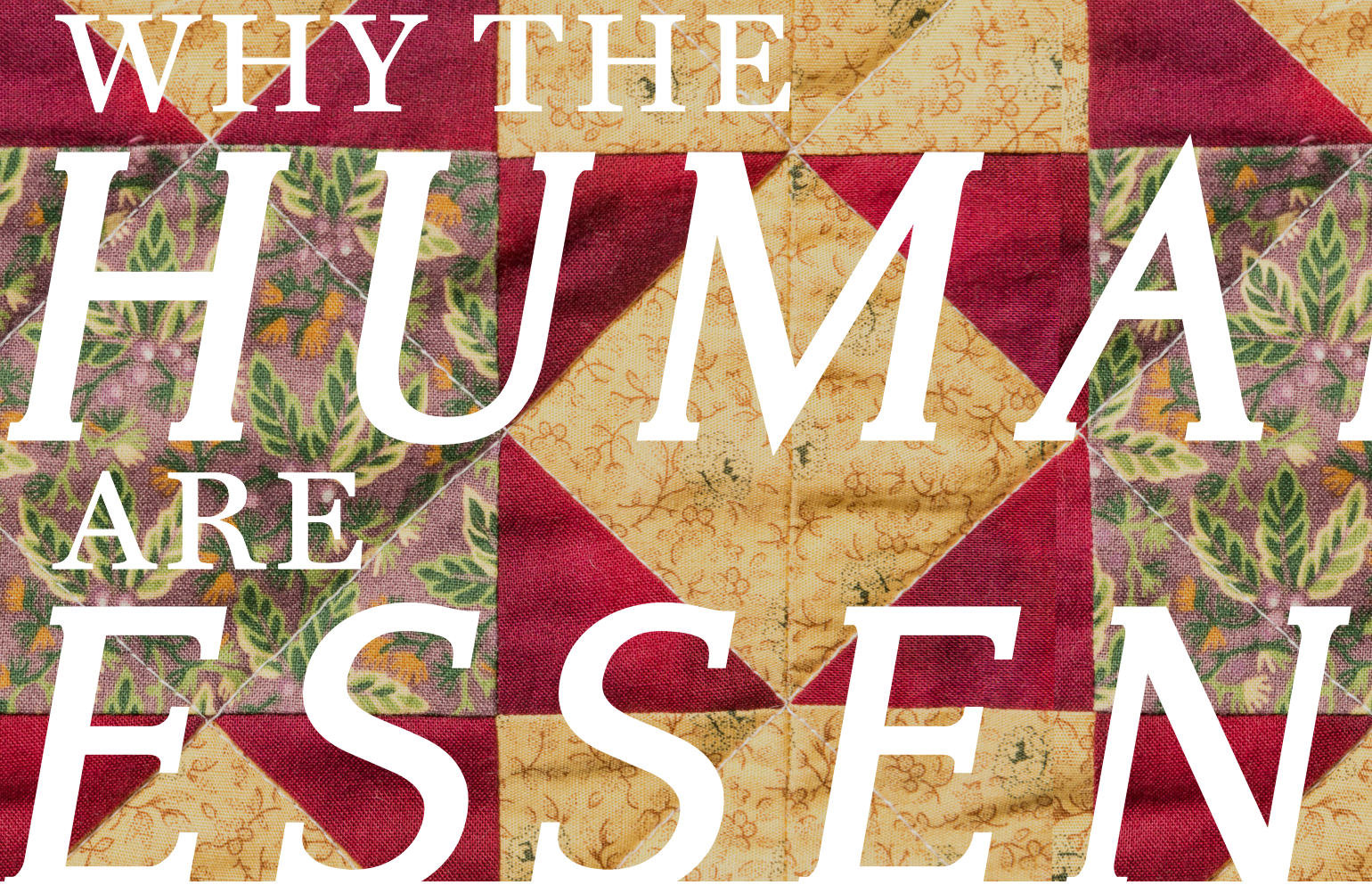
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WHY THE HUMANITIES ARE ESSENTIAL

By Dr. Eric Waggoner

Since 1974, the West Virginia Humanities Council has played a pivotal role in preserving, sharing, and celebrating the rich cultural and historical narratives that shape our identity as West Virginians. We are deeply committed to telling the stories that connect us to our past and guide us toward a more informed future. Whether through the lens of folklore, literature, history, or the arts, we strive to honor the voices of those who have lived and worked in this diverse and vibrant state.

In our mission to make the humanities accessible to all, we have continuously expanded our efforts, funding a wide variety of projects that bring these stories to life in unique and impactful ways. From exhibits that transport visitors into the heart of our history, to documentaries that capture the essence of our evolving culture, to books and publications that document the lived experiences of generations past and present, we work tirelessly to foster a deeper understanding of our state's diverse heritage. The Council has supported educational initiatives such as workshops, lectures, and even hands-on archaeological digs, offering opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to engage directly with West Virginia's history. These programs not only educate but also cultivate a sense of pride and connection within our communities, allowing individuals to see themselves as active participants in the ongoing story of the state.

While much has changed since our early years, the core principle that drives our work remains unchanged: a firm belief in the critical importance of the humanities. In a world that is increasingly focused on technology and rapid change, we remain steadfast in our commitment to preserving the stories, traditions, and knowledge that have shaped West Virginia and its people. It is through the humanities that we find meaning, identity, and a sense of belonging. We continue to honor this commitment, ensuring that the stories of West Virginia's past are shared and celebrated for generations to come.



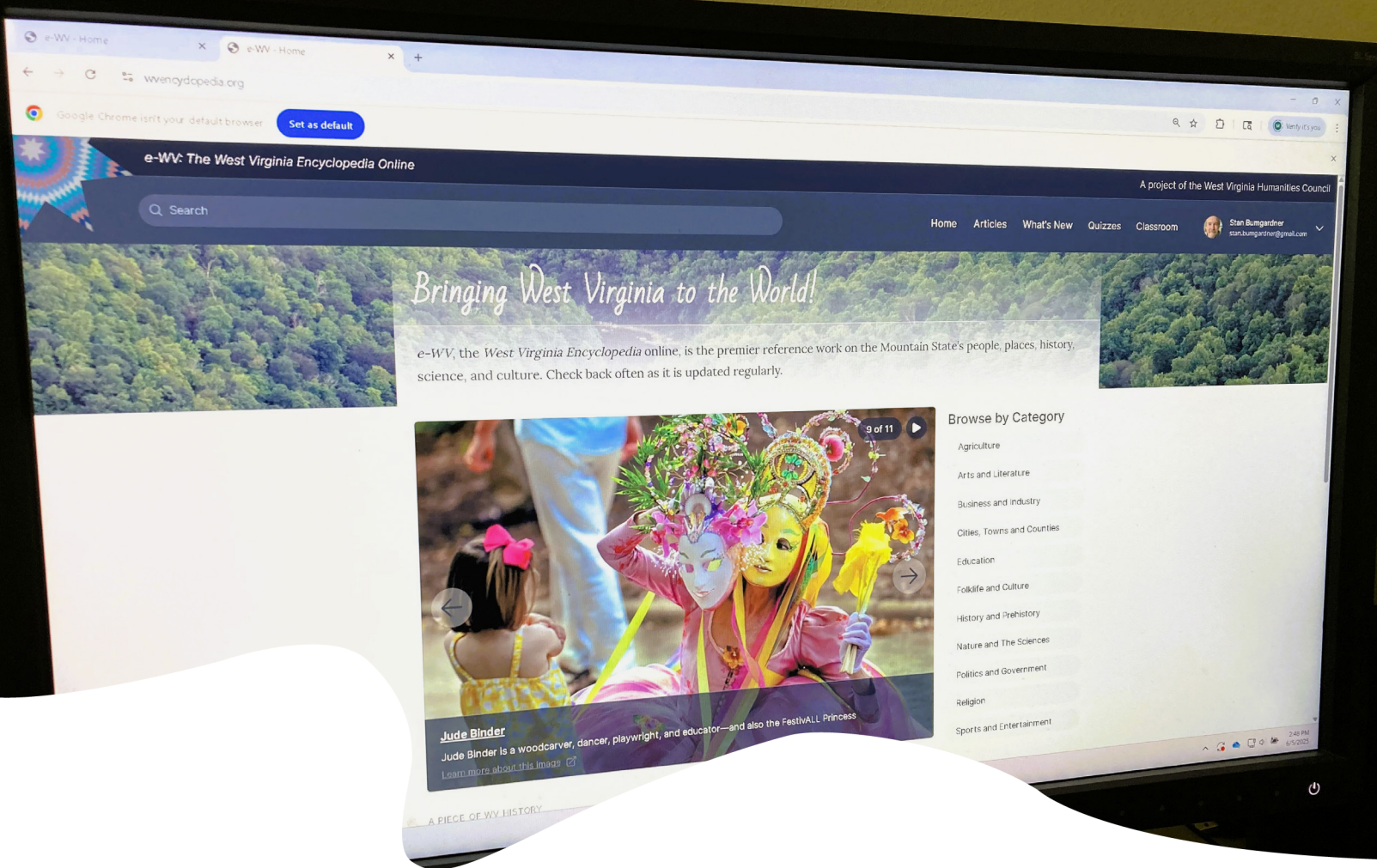
HUMANITIES TRAIL

When we gather to read, watch a film, analyze a painting, or discuss our history, we engage in a process of reflection that helps us understand what it means to be human. These moments allow us to connect with people whose lives and experiences may be vastly different from our own, yet whose stories share a common thread of struggle, hope, and resilience. By delving into art, literature, and the events of the past, we confront the complexities of human existence and, in doing so, gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

In these spaces of learning and reflection, we also face our past—both the triumphs and the mistakes. It is through this confrontation that we develop the empathy and awareness needed to foster positive change. The humanities offer us not only knowledge but also a lens through which we can explore the intricacies of human behavior, relationships, and society. They empower us with the tools to think critically, to ask important questions, and to dream about how we can build better futures—not just for ourselves, but for the communities we belong to. In the case of West Virginia, the humanities can help us reimagine a future where creativity and understanding fuel progress for the entire state and beyond.

We are incredibly proud of our continued commitment to the humanities and to all those who contribute to our mission. We believe that when we come together to explore, learn, and celebrate, we strengthen the bonds that tie us to one another, and, ultimately, to the world. ~

Dr. Eric Waggoner is executive director of the Council.



e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia Online

By Stan Bumgardner

Perhaps the most ambitious project of our last 50 years has been the research, writing, editing, and publication of *The West Virginia Encyclopedia* (2006). It was the first complete, one-volume reference book about the state in nearly a century.

Working under the slogan “All there is to know about West Virginia,” the editors packed more than 350 illustrations and 2,200 articles into this 927-page book, written by almost 600 experts on topics including archaeology, biography, geology, history, literature, folklore, culture, military history, and the arts and sciences.

In 2010, the Council launched an online version of the print book to make this comprehensive resource more easily accessible and keep it

up-to-date. Since then, *e-WV* has added hundreds of new articles and images, thousands of new quiz questions, and nearly 70 K-8 lesson plans on various topics, including a Civics Toolkit. *e-WV* has become the place to learn about all things West Virginia in ways that are academically rigorous and enjoyable to explore.

e-WV also distributes the column “This Week in West Virginia History” to every newspaper in the state. Teachers often use these articles and our daily online “Today in WV History” to make our past more relevant to students today. *e-WV* has become a uniquely useful and interactive West Virginia resource for users of every age, attracting nearly 500,000 unique visitors a year and about a million page views.

Stan Bumgardner is the e-WV media editor.



This year marks the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution, so it seems like an appropriate time to introduce a new *e-WV* feature: 250 Years Ago in West Virginia History. We have a great one to start with—back to nearly the beginning of the Revolution. When the war started in Massachusetts in April 1775, militiamen from what is now West Virginia were among the first to volunteer. Here's their story.

The Bee Line March

By Lee R. Maddex

In June 1775, the Continental Congress ordered the formation of two companies of Virginia riflemen to march to the aid of George Washington's forces at Boston. Washington recommended that Hugh Stephenson and Daniel Morgan command the two companies. Stephenson raised his company in the Shepherdstown area, while Morgan raised his around Winchester. As the companies were being raised, a rivalry ensued between the two commanders. Each wanted the privilege of leading the way, an honor to be given to the first to fill his company.

Within a week both companies were filled, and after six weeks of preparation both were ready and eager to get to Boston. Stephenson and Morgan agreed that the two companies would rendezvous at nearby Frederick, Maryland, and march together to Boston. Stephenson arrived at Frederick only to find that Morgan, wanting to arrive at Boston first, had stolen a day's march. Stephenson's 98-man company left on July 17 and attempted to overtake their rivals, often marching 30 to 36 miles in a day, but were unable to do so. After marching 600 miles in 24 days, Stephenson's riflemen arrived at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and were placed in the defense of Roxbury. Morgan had arrived five days before. The extraordinary journey of the Virginians became known as the Bee Line March.

Lee R. Maddex, a native of Pittsburgh, earned his B.A. in mathematics and M.A. in public history from WVU. While he has spent most of his career in cultural resources management, he has also worked at WVU and Carnegie Mellon University. He was a three-term AmeriCorps member, as well, serving at the Morgantown History Museum and at WVU's West Virginia & Regional History Center. He's now retired.



Historical marker for the Bee Line March rally point in Shepherdstown's Morgan's Grove Park
Photo by Emerging Revolutionary War Era

To support *e-WV*, you can donate online at wvhumanities.org/donate/donate-here or by mail at 1310 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25301.
[Learn more at wvencyclopedia.org](http://wvencyclopedia.org)



GRANT SPOTLIGHT

By Erin Riebe

For more than 50 years, the West Virginia Humanities Council has offered matching grants to nonprofit organizations that provide public humanities programming to West Virginians. These grants range from lectures, school projects, and symposia and panel discussions to documentaries, reading and discussion series, exhibits, and reenactments. Grant award amounts range from \$2,000 to \$20,000.

Our Travel Assistance grants, in amounts up to \$500, have helped students, teachers, and cultural professionals attend meetings of the Appalachian Studies Association, International Thespian Festival, Shakespeare Association, American Library Association, Society for American Archaeology, and American Folklore Society.

Unique to West Virginia, our \$3,000 fellowships support individual research and writing projects in the humanities for teachers, college faculty, and independent scholars.

Learn more at wvhumanities.org/grants

Grant Categories

Although grant making is temporarily paused, the **Humanities Council** considers applications in the following grant categories:

Major Grants support humanities events such as symposia, conferences, exhibits, and lectures.

Minigrants have a budget of \$2,000 or less and support small projects, single events, or planning.

Fellowships of \$3,000 support research and writing projects for humanities faculty and scholars.

Media Grants support the production of electronic or film materials, or a newspaper series.

Publication Grants are available to recognized nonprofit and academic presses and support only the production phase of a completed manuscript.

Teacher Institute Grants are available to colleges and universities and the state Department of Education, and support summer seminars for secondary and elementary teachers.

Alchemy Theatre

The Council has awarded Alchemy Theatre in Huntington grants the last five years. This community-based company supports local artists and provides professional entertainment to inspire positive change in the community and beyond. The theatre troupe says that the Council’s “generosity and help have allowed us to grow our festival exponentially each year, and have incredible free offerings throughout the year.”



Friends of Ashby's Fort

Mineral County's Fort Ashby, believed to be the only remaining French and Indian War structure in West Virginia, hosts programs related to frontier history. Friends of Ashby's Fort has received several Council grants over recent years for archaeology digs, workshops on Appalachian old-time music, and a demonstration of dendrochronology—the science or technique of dating events, environmental changes, and archaeological artifacts.

Greenbrier Historical Society

Founded in 1963, the society preserves the rich history of the Greenbrier Valley. Serving four counties—Greenbrier, Monroe, Summers, and Pocahontas—the society owns and manages the Blue Sulphur Springs Pavilion in Monroe County and Lewisburg's North House Museum & Archives, The Barracks, and the 1834 Supreme Court of Appeals Law Library & Study Building. Over the last six years, the Council has awarded six minigrants to the historical society to further its goals.



Erin Riebe is the grants administrator for the Council.

MEDIA GRANTS



Mimi Pickering, Appalshop

By Stan Bumgardner

The Council's media grants (up to \$20,000) have supported the planning, scripting, and production of countless audio or video materials, websites, and newspaper series over the years, including groundbreaking and award-winning documentaries.

“These stories portray the state’s beauty and the people’s strength to audiences locally, nationally, and around the world.”
—Mimi Pickering

In 1985, Appalshop released *Buffalo Creek Revisited*, an award-winning companion to *The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man* (1975). In this powerful documentary, filmmaker Mimi Pickering revisited the tragic 1972 Buffalo Creek Disaster in Logan County, caused by the collapse of an impoundment dam owned by the Buffalo Mining Company. The disaster released a flood of black water and coal slurry that devastated 17 communities, killed 125 people, injured hundreds, and left thousands homeless. The documentary examines the lasting impact on survivors, the legal battles that followed, and the long-term effects on the area, while reflecting on the social, political, and environmental issues raised by the disaster, particularly the roles of industry and government in overseeing public safety.

Pickering emphasizes that she could not have produced the film without Council funds: “Looking back 40 years now, it has been screened many times throughout the state and shared with other communities around the country that are looking to rebuild after devastating disasters.”

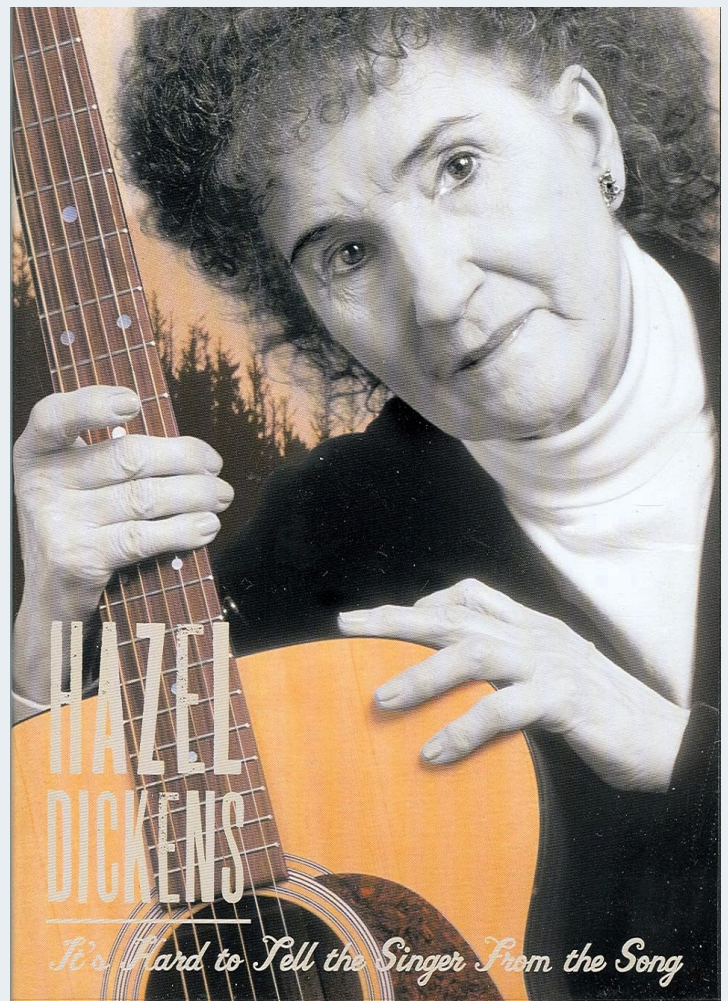
Buffalo Creek Revisited was included in the Council-funded *Moving Mountains*, one of the first



Latrobe, in Buffalo Creek Hollow, after the flood

documentary series aired on West Virginia Public Broadcasting featuring histories, artists, and organizers from West Virginia's coalfields. One film in that series, ***Nimrod Workman: To Fit My Own Category***, has just been named to the Library of Congress' 2025 National Recording Registry. Pickering believes "it is a great honor for the people of West Virginia and the Humanities Council, as well as the Workman family."

Pickering's film portrait of the beloved and internationally recognized West Virginia singer and songwriter, ***Hazel Dickens: It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song*** (2001), was also made possible by a Council media grant. From West Virginia's coalfields to Baltimore's factories, Dickens lived the songs she sang. A bluegrass pioneer and voice for working people, her powerful vocals fueled union rallies and films such as *Harlan County USA*. *Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song* profiles her life, music, and feminist perspective shaped by her Appalachian working-class roots. Soon after the film was released, Dickens was honored with the NEA's National Heritage Fellowship, our nation's highest honor for traditional artists. Pickering sees Dickens' "stature continuing to grow as new audiences discover her through this film."



Pickering reflects that Council-funded audio and film documentaries "have shared the history of the southern coalfields and stories from their many notable characters to students, educators, and the public in West Virginia and well beyond. These stories portray the state's beauty and the people's strength to audiences locally, nationally, and around the world who often have only negative stereotypical images of West Virginia. Without funding and expertise from the Council, much of this would not have been possible."



Trey Kay,
Trey Kay Productions

“I honestly don’t think I’d have a career as a documentary journalist focusing on America’s culture wars if it wasn’t for the West Virginia Humanities Council.”
—Trey Kay

The Council has supported Trey Kay’s *The Great Textbook War* (2009) and his radio podcast *Us & Them* (2014–present). Both have aired on West Virginia Public Radio, exploring divisions in American society through different lenses. *The Great Textbook War* audio documentary centered on a 1974–75 controversy in Kanawha County where conservative groups pushed for textbooks that reflected their views on American history, religion, and social values. Concerned with what they saw as a left-leaning bias, these groups challenged the portrayal of issues such as civil rights, feminism, and the Vietnam War. The conflict ignited heated debates, violence, protests, and changes in the way textbooks were reviewed and adopted, exposing the influence of political and social agendas on education. Ultimately, the controversy sparked ongoing discussions about academic freedom, the role of education in shaping societal values, and how history should be taught in schools. **The project was honored with a national Edward R. Murrow Award and a Peabody Award.**

Kay remembers that when the potentially controversial audio documentary first aired, he received accolades from “people on either side of the ideological and political spectrum because we’d handled the story fairly.”

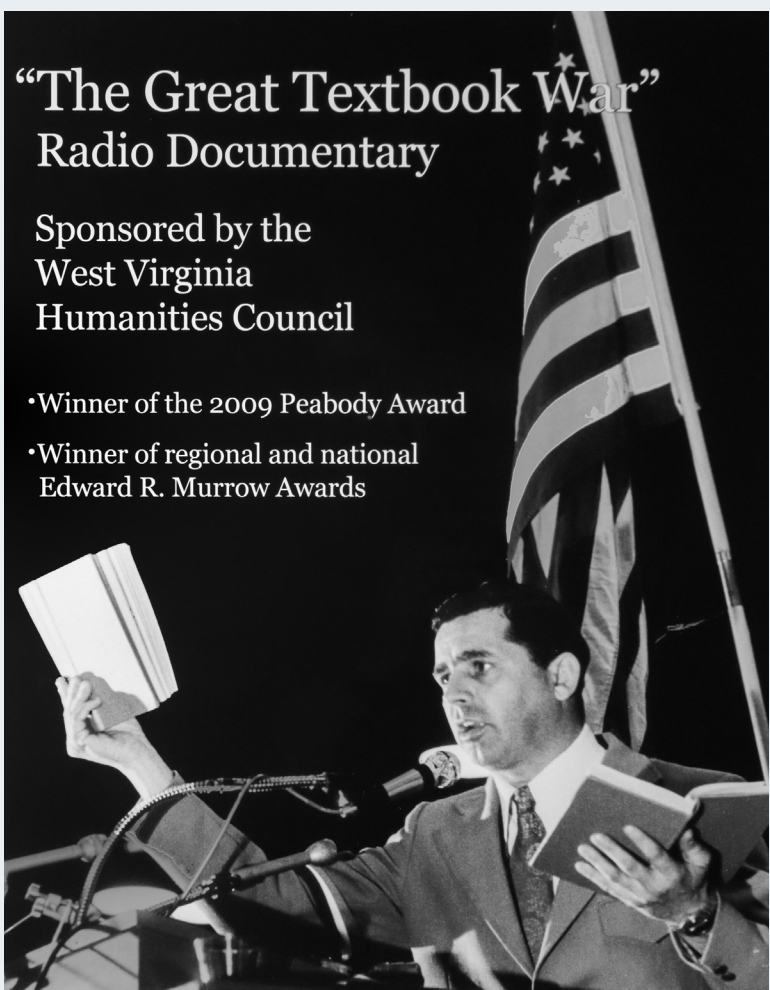
HOUSING OPTIONS ARE FEW & FAR BETWEEN IN APPALACHIA

US & THEM

Similarly, *Us & Them*, a continuing podcast created by Kay, delves into divisions within the United States over politics, race, class, and culture. It tells personal stories of individuals caught in “us vs. them” dynamics, bringing a human element to discussions of conflicts. The podcast fosters empathy and understanding, encouraging listeners to critically examine their own perspectives and find common ground.

Through interviews with everyday people and experts, *Us & Them* explores both local and national issues, aiming to bridge divides. The show has earned a regional Edward R. Murrow Award for its impactful storytelling and exploration of societal issues.

“I don’t know of many other sources,” Kay says, “that would fund this type of work other than the Humanities Council. I honestly don’t think I’d have a career as a documentary journalist focusing on America’s culture wars if it wasn’t for the West Virginia Humanities Council.”





Elaine McMillion Sheldon, Requisite Media

Oscar-nominated director Elaine McMillion Sheldon's documentaries *Hollow* (2013) and *King Coal* (2023) both offer powerful, intimate looks at the challenges faced by communities in West Virginia due to the decline of the coal industry.

Hollow delves into the lives of rural West Virginia residents, particularly in McDowell County, which has suffered from population loss, economic hardship, and social struggles linked to the coal industry's decline. Through personal stories, the documentary examines issues such as job scarcity, the opioid epidemic, and a fading sense of hope. The film's name, *Hollow*, reflects not only the physical emptiness of abandoned towns but also the emotional void felt by the people. Sheldon's approach humanizes the residents, showing them not as victims of economic change but as resilient individuals with deep ties to their community.

King Coal continues Sheldon's exploration of Appalachia's relationship with coal, focusing on how the industry has shaped the region's identity, traditions, and economic life. Through a mix of personal stories and a close examination



of the environmental and economic tolls of coal mining, the film paints a nuanced picture of a community grappling with the industry's decline. Sheldon, a West Virginia native, brings a deeply personal perspective to the story, highlighting the emotional and social impacts of this transformation while also exploring broader themes of environmental justice, economic hardship, and the search for new opportunities. Both films are deeply human and offer a sense of hope amidst adversity, urging viewers to consider

“It was a vote of confidence that allowed me to keep working, to keep dreaming, and to do it from my home state of West Virginia.”
—Elaine McMillion Sheldon



the resilience and complexity of the people in these communities.

Sheldon reflects on the Council’s role in her films: “The Humanities Council was the first to believe in both *Hollow* and *King Coal*—long before national funders came on board, or awards were handed out. That early support wasn’t just financial—it was a vote of confidence that allowed me to keep working, to keep dreaming, and to do it from my home state of West Virginia. It gave me the time and space to dig deeper, to collaborate with local communities, and to trust that these stories had value even before they were fully formed.”

Both films went on to receive national and international recognition—screening at **Sundance**, winning a **Peabody**, earning an **Emmy nomination**, and being named a *New York Times Critics Pick*. “It’s almost impossible to overstate,” Sheldon says, “how important that kind of early support is for artists working in and about this place. It’s what makes the work possible in the first place.”

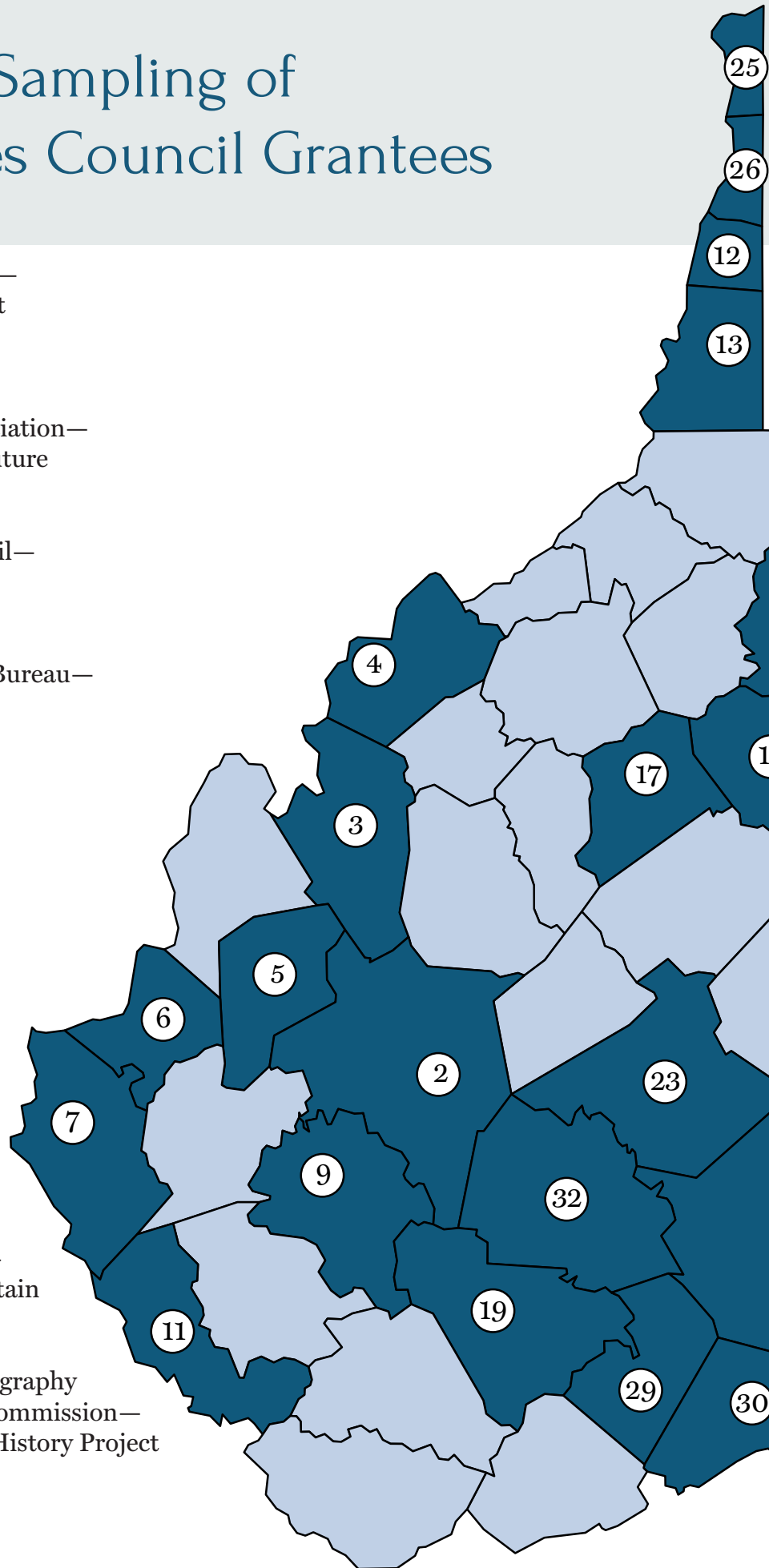
Storytelling—a traditional way of sharing information since the beginning of human existence—is essential to West Virginia’s story. Amidst tragedy and suffering, we are a resilient people. We pull together at our worst and excel at our best because, to paraphrase Hazel Dickens, “West Virginia, it’s where we belong.” Sometimes we need good storytellers to remind us why we belong here. ~

Stan Bumgardner is the e-WV media editor.

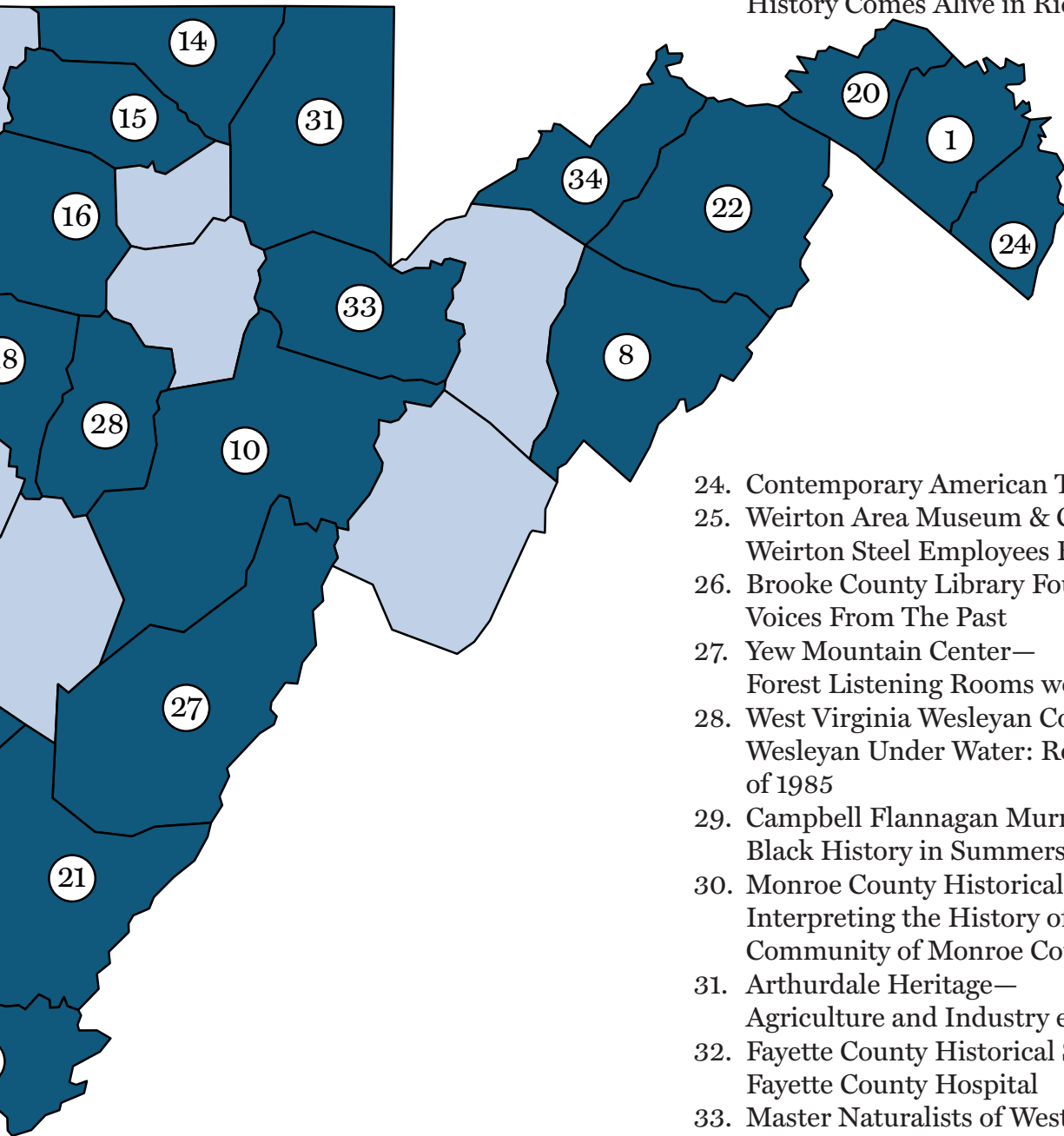


A Sampling of Humanities Council Grantees

1. Berkeley County Board of Education—
Discovering and Sharing the Greatest
Stories Never Told
2. FestivALL—
Appalachian Authors' Roundtables
3. Jackson County Public Library Association—
Digitizing the Past, Preserving the Future
4. Parkersburg Art Center—
ArtistTrees 2024
5. Kanawha Valley Rivers to Ridges Trail—
wayside exhibits
6. Ohio River Festival of Books
7. Wayne County Quilt Trail
8. Hardy County Covention & Visitors Bureau—
Robert Higgins House Museum,
master plan implementation
9. National Coal Heritage Area—
Coal Mining Heritage Festival
10. Augusta Heritage Center—
Humanities at Augusta
11. West Virginia Mine Wars Museum—
Treason Trials exhibit
12. Grow Ohio Valley—
Wheeling Community Cookbook
13. Marshall County Historical Society—
World War II exhibit,
Cockayne Farmstead
14. Scotts Run Museum and Trail—
Preserving the Stories of Scotts Run
15. Fairmont State University—
Sand and Fire: 200 Years of
West Virginia Glass exhibit
16. Harrison County Historical Society—
Revealed: A Glimpse behind the Curtain
of Harrison County's Women
17. Glenville State University—
Traditional Music and Tintype Photography
18. City of Weston Historic Landmark Commission—
The Weston African American Oral History Project
19. Workshops by WV Authors—
Daniels Elementary School
20. Museum of the Berkeley Springs—
Morgan County Bicentennial



Since 2019, the West Virginia Humanities Council has awarded grants totaling three million dollars to humanities programming in West Virginia. This three million has been matched, dollar for dollar, putting more than six million back into West Virginia communities. Here are just a few examples:



21. Carnegie Hall—
Salt-Rising Bread workshop
22. Capon Bridge Ruritan Club—
“Focus on History,” Founders’ Day
23. Richwood Area Chamber of Commerce—
History Comes Alive in Richwood

24. Contemporary American Theater Festival
25. Weirton Area Museum & Cultural Center—
Weirton Steel Employees Bulletin Online Archive
26. Brooke County Library Foundation—
Voices From The Past
27. Yew Mountain Center—
Forest Listening Rooms workshop
28. West Virginia Wesleyan College—
Wesleyan Under Water: Remembering the Flood of 1985
29. Campbell Flannagan Murrell House Museum—
Black History in Summers County, WV
30. Monroe County Historical Society—
Interpreting the History of the African American Community of Monroe County, WV
31. Arthurdale Heritage—
Agriculture and Industry exhibit
32. Fayette County Historical Society—
Fayette County Hospital
33. Master Naturalists of West Virginia—
A Day with the Original Master Naturalists
34. Friends of Ashby’s Fort—
Dendrochronology workshop

THE POWER OF THE WORD



Photos by Michael Keller

Percival Everett's 2024 McCreight Lecture in the Humanities

By Kyle Warmack

My name is James. I wish I could tell my story with a sense of history as much as industry. I was sold when I was born and then sold again. My mother's mother was from someplace on the continent of Africa, I had been told or perhaps simply assumed. I cannot claim to any knowledge of that world or those people, whether my people were kings or beggars. I admire those who, at five years of age, like Venture Smith, can remember the clans of their ancestors, their names and the movements of their families through the wrinkles, trenches, and chasms of the slave trade. I can tell you that I am a man who is cognizant of his world, a man who has a family, a man who can read and write, a man who will not let his story be self-related, but self-written.

—excerpt from *James* by Percival Everett

In some novels, this declaration of identity is the kickoff, answering the all-important question, “who” is our protagonist? “Call me Ishmael,” says Melville’s narrator, as *Moby Dick* embarks on its opening page. Such beginnings sketch out the preliminary boundaries of character and personality that we,

the audience, are to inhabit for the duration of a novel such as Percival Everett's *James*, which was released last year to universal acclaim.

The titular character of James—the same “Jim” of Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)—does not scribble these words until nearly a hundred pages into Everett's novel. By this juncture, the importance of James being able to read and write is far better understood by the audience:

No one came by the spot I had chosen as camp. I listened for dogs, but that awful sound never came. . . . I read. I never felt more exposed or vulnerable as I did in the light of day with a book open. What if I had been spotted by one of the local plantation's overseers? Or a slave who might have been frightened by the sight? Or a slave who simply wanted to ingratiate himself to his master? There were those slaves who claimed a distinction between good masters and cruel masters. Most of us considered such to be a distinction without a difference.

On the run from slavecatchers, James can scratch out his declaration of identity only at this point in the novel because three illegal acts have been committed: (1) He is on the run from his owner based on a legal system designed to keep him in bondage; (2) he has received a stolen pencil from another enslaved man; and (3) he has committed the forbidden act of writing.

The first law proscribing literacy among Blacks in what was to become the American South was the colony of South Carolina's *Negro Act of 1740*. The same act forbade Black enslaved people from traveling without a written permit from their enslavers “as it is absolutely necessary to the safety of this Province, that all due care be taken to restrain the wanderings and meetings of Negroes and other slaves.”

Even the clothing of enslaved people was regulated since too many South Carolina Black residents *supposedly* had taken to sporting apparel “much



above the condition of slaves, for the procuring whereof they use sinister and evil methods.” South Carolina's legislation went on to describe exactly which fabrics enslaved people could wear.

Over the next century, similarly draconian legislation spread throughout the South, drawing stark boundaries around the world into which Everett's James is born, and in which he has learned to survive.

The crux of the novel, however, is that mere survival is not enough. Despite the towering threats of a society weaponized against much of its population *learning to learn*, James is driven to read and write. Language is his liberation, a theme that burns like a river of fire throughout Everett's text. It is no accident, therefore, that the powerful necessity of literature—indeed, of reading and writing in almost any form—was a prevalent discussion topic during Percival Everett's visit to Charleston last October, when he delivered the Council's 2024 McCreight Lecture in the Humanities.

For the Council's 50th anniversary, the staff sponsored a McCreight Lecture unlike any in recent memory. Rather than host the distinguished but surprisingly low-key Everett at one of the traditional theaters or lecture halls scattered around the capital, we selected the Capitol Theater on Summers Street—Charleston's oldest surviving movie theater (now owned by Resurrection Church and used for live events)—originally built about 1914 in the waning days of vaudeville.

The venerable old hall proved perfect for a large, appreciative downtown Charleston crowd on the city's last ArtWalk of the year. Projected above the stage was a prominent banner celebrating our 50th

anniversary and the generous sponsorship of West Virginia's Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs, whose support made the evening more significant. Only a handful of seats remained as the lights dimmed and the stage glowed to welcome Everett—who won the National Book Award for *James* a mere month later—and his signature gravelly voice, so often paired with a wry half-smile throughout his remarks.

In appearances elsewhere, Everett's remarks have highlighted James' resistance. "Reading is a subversive act," Everett has said. "The people seeking to ban books either can't read, or don't read."

The author spoke in similar terms that night, in view of the Kanawha County Public Library's lights glowing up, down, and across Summers Street. "What is the value of art that disturbs us, that troubles us, that shakes us up?" asked Council Executive Director Eric Waggoner.

"I think any art that addresses truth can do that," Everett responded. "We understand happiness because we understand grief and sadness. In fact, so much humor issues from our difficult times, our hard times. Some of our most intellectual

and interesting humor comes from oppressed situations, oppressed people."

This appreciation of humor as a form of resilience—and of literature, art, and the production of knowledge as fundamentally subversive expressions that provide people with tools in the face of oppression—is a through-line of Everett's work, and one of the points that has remained salient in the minds of the staff long after the author boarded his plane at Yeager Airport.

Indeed, the event left its mark on audience members as well. Though more than seven months have passed, staff members are still approached by people who recognize our logo and say, "I went to the Percival Everett talk last year. It was amazing." A librarian friend has told me more than once that she'll remember it for the rest of her life.

So will we. It's the kind of programming the Council has brought to West Virginians for 50 years. And we hope to continue for at least a half-century more. ~

Kyle Warmack is the Council's program officer.

To support our programs, you can donate online at wvhumanities.org/donate/donate-here or by mail at 1310 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25301.



PROGRAM NOTES

Due to the recent DOGE cuts to the NEH in early April, all new *History Alive!* bookings have been paused. You may continue to see some *History Alive!* presentations in your area, booked before the moratorium was put in place.

Thanks to generous funding from the Herscher Foundation, our 2025 Little Lectures series will continue as scheduled. Join us at our Charleston headquarters on June 22 (poet Doug Van Gundy) and July 20 (novelist Mesha Maren) for in-depth discussions of West Virginia literature.



Mesha Maren



Future issues of *The Broad Side* publication will be included in *People & Mountains*.

Where Our Money Comes From... and Goes

By Heather Campbell

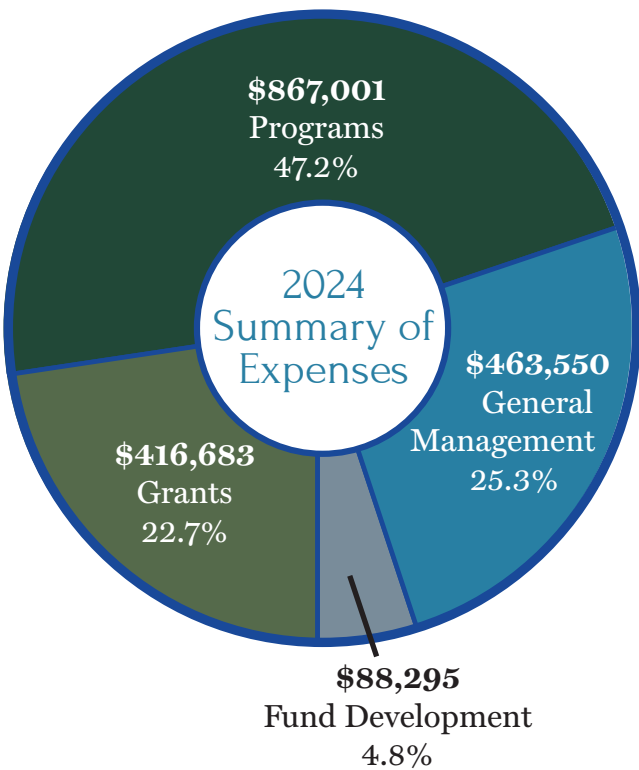
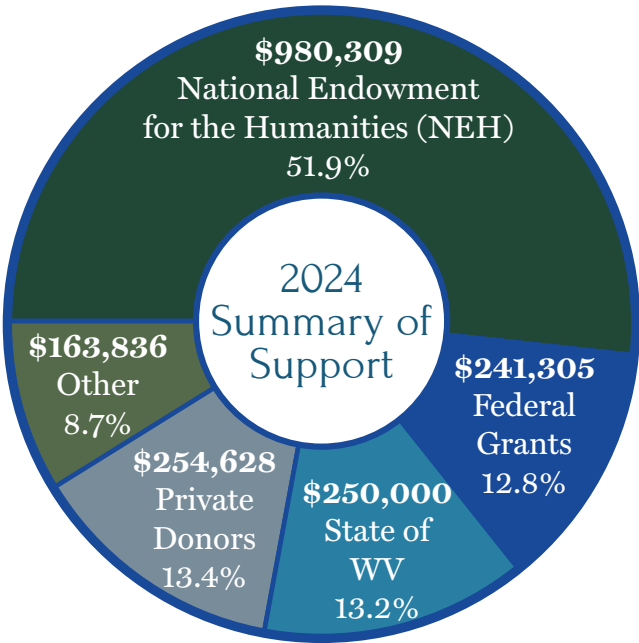
Hello, *People & Mountains* readers! I was thrilled when the editor asked me to write a few words about how the Council uses grant funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In 2024, fully 83.92 percent of our award from the NEH went directly to Council grants and programs.

Our grants used 42.99% of the NEH funds. Grants awarded by the Council funded many projects in communities all across West Virginia—from the Contemporary American Theater Festival in Shepherdstown to the Jackson County Public Library digitizing frail historical documents.

Our programs used 40.93% of the NEH funds. Without this support, the Council would not have been able to present author Percival Everett as our 2024 McCreight Lecturer in the Humanities in conversation about his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *James* or cosponsor the 2024 West Virginia Book Festival. NEH support also allowed us to share our Little Lectures speaker series with a worldwide audience through the Council’s YouTube Channel.

The federal funds the Council received for grants and programs have been matched dollar for dollar with funding from other sources, whether from public support, the Council’s donors, or by grantee sponsoring organizations. Our goal is to leverage our funding to support communities in telling their stories and to bring thought-provoking programming to all West Virginians.

Heather Campbell is the Council’s fiscal officer.



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Patrick Cassidy of Wheeling

By Katie Morris

When asked why he supports the Humanities Council as a GEM (Give Every Month) donor, former board member Patrick Cassidy says, “Let me respond with a quote from a former and beloved by most—if not all—Americans. U.S. President John F. Kennedy spoke these words at Amherst College (nationally renowned for its humanities programs) just a month before his assassination:

‘When power leads men towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness of and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.’

Once a month, I contribute to remind myself of the importance of the humanities to our country, our state—especially in this time of uncertainty for education in the humanities. It’s reason enough to make me want to do my part, each month, every month, however modest.

I urge you to become a GEM supporter as well, and remember that the humanities not only cleanse the corruption of power, as President Kennedy said, but preserve our freedom as well.”



Photo by Michael Keller

Katie Morris is the Council’s development director.

View our full recent Donor List at
wvhumanities.org/donate/donor-list



Your Gift Matters Now More Than Ever!

The Federation of State Humanities Councils with support from the Mellon Foundation has offered an additional \$50,000 in matching funds to the West Virginia Humanities Council. All funds raised between April 29, 2025, and the end of the year will be matched dollar for dollar, doubling their impact on the Council’s future.

Contribute online at
wvhumanities.org/donate/donate-here
or by mail at 1310 Kanawha Blvd. East,
Charleston, WV 25301.



*Become a GEM donor and receive a
limited edition cryptid pin
designed by Liz Pavlovic*



Our Historic Headquarters

By Tricia Stringer

For over 20 years, the West Virginia Humanities Council has called the MacFarland-Hubbard House home. This historic 1836 residence is one of only a handful of buildings in Charleston that predates the Civil War. Purchased by the Council in 1998 and renovated by 2000, the house serves as both a working office and a public venue for events such as our annual West Virginia Day celebration, Holiday Open House, Little Lectures series, and folklife showcases.

Built by craftsman Norris Stanley Whittaker using unfired brick made onsite, the house was first owned by merchant Henry Devol MacFarland. After his death in 1845, the Ruby family took ownership with former mayor and grocer John C. Ruby II residing here by 1851. During the Civil War, Union soldiers used the house as a makeshift hospital. A Confederate cannonball was fired into the house during the 1862 Battle of Charleston (though it was not the intended target).

The Ruby family, who left when Union forces took control of the Kanawha Valley, returned post-war. In 1921, the Crowley family purchased and modernized the home, likely subdividing the property. John W. and Mary Ashby Hubbard acquired the house in 1941, adding a second-floor extension and expanding the kitchen. John Hubbard died a year after the purchase, leaving equal shares to his wife and daughter, Elizabeth. Following Elizabeth's death, she bequeathed it to Charleston's First Presbyterian Church.

The Council bought the house a year later, preserving its legacy and transforming it into a cultural and civic hub.

Tricia Stringer is operations manager for the Council.

Visit us for our West Virginia Day open house on Friday, June 20, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. More than ever, we look forward to seeing you at our historic headquarters!



AT THE HEART OF FOLKLIFE

By Dr. Jennie S. Williams

What is folklife and why is it important?
How do communities benefit from grants and organizations dedicated to supporting folk and traditional arts?

Because of the recent and deep funding cuts to the National Endowment for the Humanities, I'm moved to reflect on the importance of organizations dedicated to the humanities and arts, and to acknowledge the precariousness of institutions that preserve and promote our many stories, traditions, cultural expressions, creativity, and collective histories.

Folklorist Mary Hufford once wrote, "Folklife is community life and values, artfully expressed in myriad interactions. It is universal, diverse, and enduring" (Library of Congress, 1991). It is "universal" in the way that everyone communicates and "diverse" in that folklife is culturally informed by its time and place. Folklife is important because it connects us to our homes

and communities, and offers a strong sense of belonging and awareness of who we are and why our histories matter. As enduring as folklife is, it can easily be taken for granted. It takes considerable effort to recognize this traditional knowledge and carry it on. Artists, grandparents, teachers, and elders are experts and mentors who share repertoires of stories, songs, recipes, and dances. Without them, we easily forget, and may never learn, about the depth and diversity of our communities.

Who do you ask about family history? Who among your neighbors knows how to grow heirloom vegetables or preserve food? Do you keep photographs or even recorded interviews of your ancestors practicing family traditions? Now, think about the organizations that support these efforts: museums, libraries, even dance halls and churches. These collective efforts safeguard our cultural traditions and keep us connected. They provide a platform to learn about our past in the present context.

“Folklife is important because it connects us to our homes and communities, and offers a strong sense of belonging and awareness of who we are and why our histories matter.”

—Mary Hufford

Importantly, organizations and their partners that support folk and traditional arts inspire people to carry traditions forward. They rely on both community engagement and financial support to make these memorable programs happen. This is why it’s essential to support the organizations behind community fairs and festivals, gatherings, workshops, exhibits, and events that the whole family can enjoy. These programs don’t happen organically and often require months of planning and collaborative efforts.

At the West Virginia Humanities Council—a nonprofit organization that in 2024 celebrated 50 years of supporting humanities-based projects—I manage the West Virginia Folklife Program. Like *Goldenseal* magazine, West Virginia Folklife is one of only a few statewide programs that promote, document, and celebrate West Virginia traditions. They facilitate educational opportunities for West Virginians, as well as chances to share with one another, identify deeper meanings behind traditions, and recognize regional cultural variations.

Our West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship program ensures a wide-reaching and sustained impact. An apprenticeship is a one-to-one method of teaching that involves years of passing on traditional skills as well as stories between a teacher and apprentice, often to support occupational training leading to mastery. Consider the increased attention and support a student



can receive with this level of focused instruction and practice. Apprenticeships are so much more than teaching. They can lead to lifelong mentorships rooted in cultural practice, history, and companionship. Many folklife programs throughout the United States provide grants to sustain traditional arts through apprenticeship models.

The West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship program continues a long-standing program folklorist Gerry Milnes managed at the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins for many years. Several traditional artists participated in the Augusta program, including when Ginny Hawker apprenticed with ballad singer Pheoba Parsons in 1989. Now, over 35 years later, Ginny has received the Vandalia Award—West Virginia’s highest folklife honor—for carrying on old-time singing traditions and participating in events that support the vitality and variations of this traditional music. Ginny is currently passing on her knowledge of Primitive Baptist hymn singing to Mary Linscheid through our own apprenticeship program. A folklife apprenticeship is a tangible example of how an organization can help artists sustain their traditional practices through another generation.

West Virginia Folklife is approaching its 10th anniversary this year. My predecessor Emily Hilliard and I have developed this program on



the shoulders of giants—relying on methods, archival collections, and publications of folklorists who preceded us. Our research projects and programs have built on their foundational work by finding innovative ways to support these initiatives, such as obtaining grants or connecting people to similar organizations and projects to build new collaborations. Regional, state, university, and community archives, as well as museums, nonprofit organizations, and even smaller-scale organizations, all possess records of West Virginia’s important cultural history. As a folklorist, I value the long-term process of spending time with communities and archival collections, attending events, and finding resourceful ways to help communities obtain funding support or other platforms to promote their work and cultural histories.



Chris Haddox (left) playing music with his fiddle repair apprentice, Mary Linscheid

Photo by Jennie S. Williams



Enrica McMillion (right) makes adjustments to an antique great spinning wheel

Photo by Andrew Carroll

Finally, we cannot rely on photographs and recorded oral histories alone. At the heart of folklife and folklore is communication. We need to channel our support to organizations that preserve both documented records of cultural knowledge, and opportunities for practicing traditions. Likewise, we cannot depend on YouTube or AI to accurately answer all our questions, or else we miss out on chances to learn directly from our elders. Traditional knowledge reflects regional differences in language, food practices, fiddle tunes, or weaving techniques—all of which are culturally informed. Embracing our cultural idiosyncrasies helps us understand who we are and where we come from. Preserving recorded knowledge along with the knowledge we learn directly from teachers

all around us reinforces our dynamic yet enduring culture and helps us carry on traditions that have been passed on to us. We need to recognize and stand up for organizations in our communities that promote folklife. After all, it represents our community life and values. ~

Connect with us at

wvfolklife.org

f @wvfolklife

Dr. Jennie S. Williams is the Council's state folklorist.



To support the West Virginia Folklife Program, you can donate online at wvhumanities.org/donate/donate-here or by mail at 1310 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25301.



Photo by Andrew Carroll



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The West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit institution, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. We welcome comments and financial contributions. Please address correspondence to:

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Email wvhuman@wvhumanities.org or call 304-346-8500



WEST VIRGINIA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

At the West Virginia Humanities Council, we believe in the power of the humanities to connect us, even in uncertain times. Across the state, our programs and grants create opportunities for West Virginians to come together, share stories, explore ideas, and engage in meaningful conversations. As we celebrate more than 50 years of championing the humanities in the Mountain State, your support matters now more than ever.

Through the end of the year, every dollar you give will be matched—up to \$50,000—thanks to the Federation of State Humanities Councils with support from the Mellon Foundation. That means your gift will have twice the impact, helping us to continue promoting vigorous programs in the humanities statewide.

As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to standing with you—and with the many organizations working to preserve and celebrate West Virginia's unique culture and history.

We're honored to continue this work on behalf of all West Virginians, today and for generations to come. We send our heartfelt thanks to you, our loyal community of donors—this important work would not be possible without you.

To make a contribution, [visit us online](#) or mail your gift to:
1310 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25301.

For questions or to explore more ways to give, contact Development Director Katie Morris at morris@wvhumanities.org.

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